The 1984 Election: The Crucial Importance of Party

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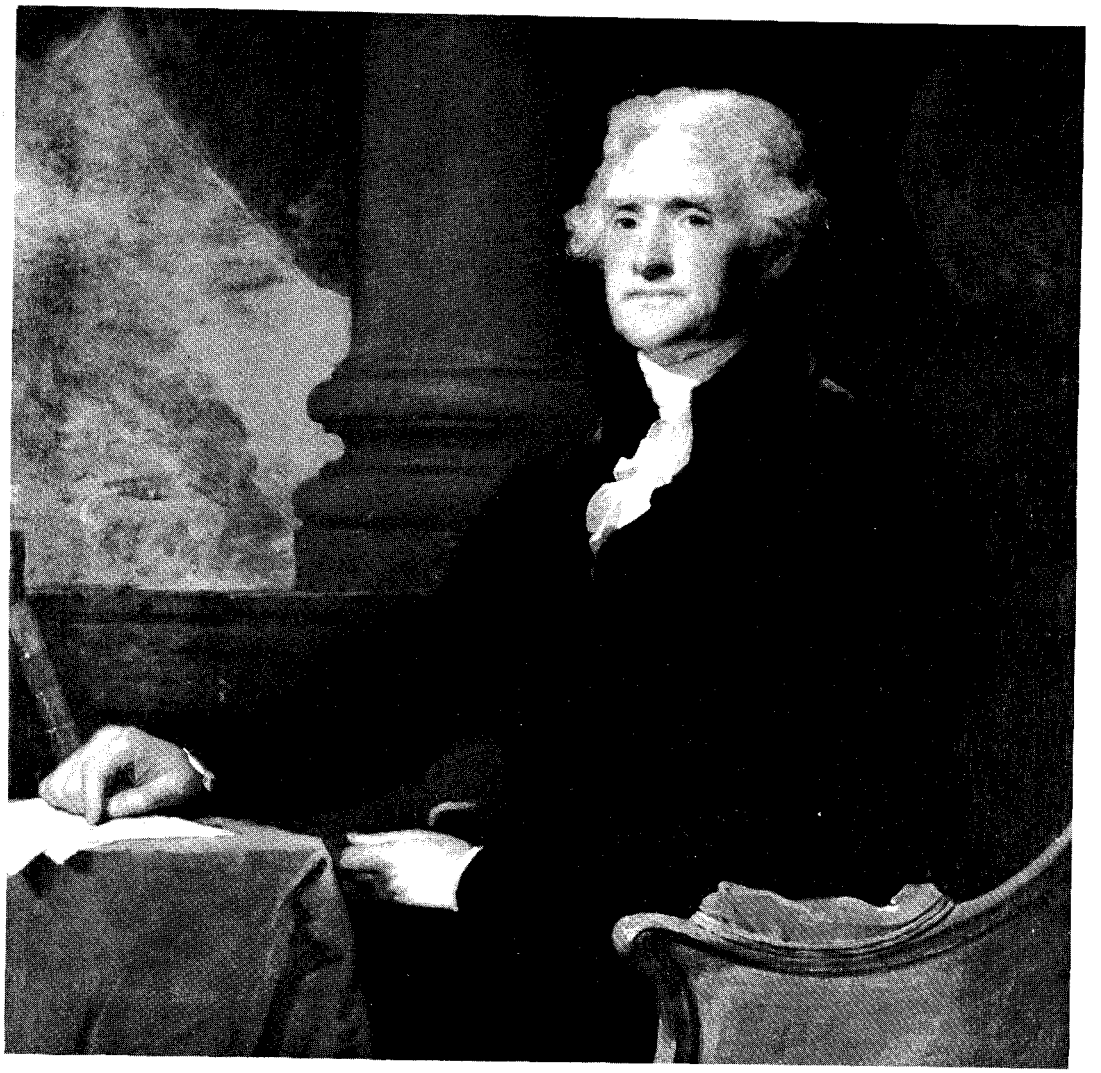

Sir Monticello Mar. 27. 25.

I am a subscriber to the N. American review and understand you are agent for that work in Richmond. it will be more convenient for me to have it furnished from that place because payment there is easier made. I shall be glad therefore to receive it from you. and this letter presented to Colo. Bernard Peyton of Richmond my correspondt will ensure your receiving payment from him on my account, once a year or oftener if you chuse. I have received No. 46. but not Nos. 44. and 45. which I shall be glad therefore now to receive. accept the assurance of my respect.

Th: J

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AN EDITORIAL:

THIS ELECTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF 'PARTY'

Political parties are presently in bad repute. The common (and sexist) phrase is, "I vote for the man, not the party," and in many states, the voters who register as "unaffiliated" or "independent" outnumber those who list themselves as Democrat or Republican. Officeholders themselves are aware of this and frequently present themselves as "independent" and "bipartisan" rather than "a loyal Democrat" or "a staunch Republican."

There are a number of historical reasons for this. One has to do with urban politics of the 19th and early 20th centuries, when in many cities there developed political machines which allowed tight control by one party or the other. Contrary to reputation, these organizations provided a number of needed services—especially to immigrant families trying to survive in a society which had not yet developed social services. But these machines were an expensive form of welfare (in Boston, for example, graft used to add a flat 10% to all city contracts—a kind of political surtax), and they gave political parties a bad name.

More recently, each of the major parties has gone through periods of unresponsiveness, obliging some of its members to split their tickets or to support independent candidates. This process began after World War II when Harry Truman, though liberal in many respects, did not move fast enough to satisfy the demands of post-war reformers (especially in social welfare and race relations) and so created an impetus for the Progessive Party under Henry Wallace. The real damage to party solidarity did not come until the Vietnam War. Many Democrats turned against their party under Lyndon Johnson and sat idly by when Hubert Humphrey appeared to be his clone. Democratic Party loyalists were equally inactive in the McGovern campaign. And the response of Republicans to their own party under Richard Nixon ranged from embarrassment to outrage.

All this aside, the two major parties not only continue to exist, they represent fundamentally different value structures. They continue to serve not merely as the mechanical means of selecting candidates and encouraging citizens to vote, but as the philosophical means by which we define our attitudes about society.

Each party, of course, has its internal divisions—as do all large institutions. But if we rise above the daily debates, we see patterns which are woven into the fabric of the country. Here is a partial list:

In foreign policy, Republicans tend to view the world as divided into two opposing camps, one essentially good and the other inherently bad and threatening. Because of this perception, Republicans support in varying degrees the growth of our armed forces, offensive as well as defensive, to levels unheard of in peacetime.

Democrats, on the other hand, perceive dangers in such an arms buildup—both economically (inflation and high interest rates) and in our chances of survival. A hostile and combative stance, they argue, leads to hostilities and combat. The word *negotiation* was used repeatedly in Mr. Mondale's acceptance speech, but it is not merely his private notion. It is one of the tenets shared by Democrats generally.

The right of intervention is another foreign-policy issue which fundamentally divides the two parties. Republicans tend to take pride at our action in Grenada, feeling that a genuine threat existed there. They see the same threat in Central America and, while few Americans want bloodshed, Republicans are more willing to risk it to preserve a regime which defines itself as anti-communist even though its record of civil liberties may be demonstrably bad.

Democrats do not feel threatened by Grenada—or by Cuba, Nicaragua, or the rebels of El Salvador. They see these nations as pitifully weak and struggling to define themselves. The names these countries give their political movements and the degree to which they support government control of their desperate economies do not impress Democrats as fitting into a vast global plot. Democrats remember the emotional talk about dominoes in Southeast Asia, and they are appalled to see the same argument resurrected and applied to Central America.

The rapid increase in global population is a problem many believe endangers the economic and political stability of the world. Yet here too the major parties have adopted radically different positions. The United States under Democratic administrations has supported efforts in a number of countries to stabilize population growth. The Republicans, however, dramatically reversed this policy at a recent UN conference on world population. By withdrawing American support for any form of birth control, they have sent a negative signal to those nations that had begun to make progress in this area.

On the domestic scene, neither party is against minorities, the poor, or the environment, but the ways by which they express their concern differ considerably. Republicans have a high regard for what they perceive as free enterprise, and this influences their approaches to social issues. They put their faith in the private sector through such tax benefits as "enterprise zones." They see the manufacture of military hardware as having a beneficial effect on unemployment. As for the environment, they are reluctant for taxpayers to foot the bill for cleaner air and water, or for safer cars or toxic-waste dump sites, and they are even more opposed to passing the cost on to manufacturers.

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Democrats tend to have more faith in government intervention than in the enlightened good will of corporate America. Although the New Deal of the 1930s addressed a different set of problems, it was based on the assumption that if citizens want to protect themselves, the government—for all its faults—is probably a better ally than the corporations. It's not that Democrats want a bigger government, but that they want a more responsive government, one which is concerned with the many and not with a few who are already sitting pretty.

It is puzzling that many Americans continue to register as "unaffiliated" since in many states they merely deprive themselves of a vote in the primaries by so doing. But even the unaffiliated define their attitudes in traditional ways. There is no direct connection between Cruise missiles, a woman on welfare, and wetlands in Maryland, but those who protested against the new generation of low-level missiles found that their fellow demonstrators almost invariably favored food stamp programs and the protection of undeveloped marshlands. Similarly, those who insist that we bring Cuba to its knees also tend to support nuclear energy and the selling of public lands for private development and profit.

In short, our beliefs about society and politics are not a hodgepodge. They form distinct patterns. These patterns are not the products of individual candidates or even of political parties. They are rooted in our sense of what the social justice is.

The trouble with "voting for the man" or woman is that we can get sidetracked. We want him or her to be more charismatic, to be younger and more handsome, to highlight this or that pet cause. Television coverage at every stage of the process encourages us to confuse the political process with a dating service. As a result, we tend to sulk and not to work for a candidate for what may be highly superficial reasons.

This election year—this year more than any other—the issues are enormously more important than the candidates. Errors in economic policy can easily increase the already growing gulf between rich and poor. Worse, continued arms development may lead to a national indebtedness which, as some predict, could bring domestic fiscal disaster in three to four years. As for the international scene, a blind failure to share the planet in a sane and reasonable way could wipe us out entirely.

Significantly, the major parties are more unified than at any time since the 1930s. Third parties and independent candidates—crucial in some other years—are not needed. The Democratic and Republican parties represent distinct world views and significantly different blueprints for survival. At no point in recent history have there been more compelling reasons to work for a political party and to vote for *all* its candidates.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This is a portentous early autumn, leading as it does into as important a presidential election as this country is likely to see. No matter what its outcome, we will at last discover how to reconcile polls which consistently show the voters to be anti-Republican on the issues but pro-Republican on Mr. Reagan—or, to put it another way, we will find out just how schizophrenic the United States really is. Our own prediction is for a close race, expensive and muddy.

Meanwhile, the NAR's autumn contents are less portentous (and rather more entertaining, we hope). The wife/husband team of Alcosser/Maechling offers poetry and a few photographs of extraordinary Nature, much of that Nature from Montana—a state enduring, as we write this, the ravages of drought and fire. For the rest, we offer an unusual range of short fictions and poems, essays and opinions, by the usual mix of regulars and newcomers.

Recent books of interest to NAR readers: *Ivy Days: Making My Way Out East,* by Susan Allen Toth, a memoir; *The American Blues,* by Ward Just, a novel; *Time to Go,* by Stephen Dixon, a collection of stories.

In-house note: The editor, an allergic type, has returned from sabbatical in time to help harvest one of the better ragweed crops in Iowa's rural history; the burden of being back in literary harness is as nothing compared to the miseries of good old-fashioned hay fever. Sandra Witt, who has served as the NAR's managing editor for the past year, winds up her duties with this issue, taking away with her the gratitude of the watery-eyed editor and, we trust, of Constant Readers.

A reminder: The NAR will resume the reading of fiction manuscripts on October 1, 1984, and thanks the legion of writers that has in the meantime channeled its ambitions elsewhere.

To sum up: Read. Pray for rain and an early frost. Vote.

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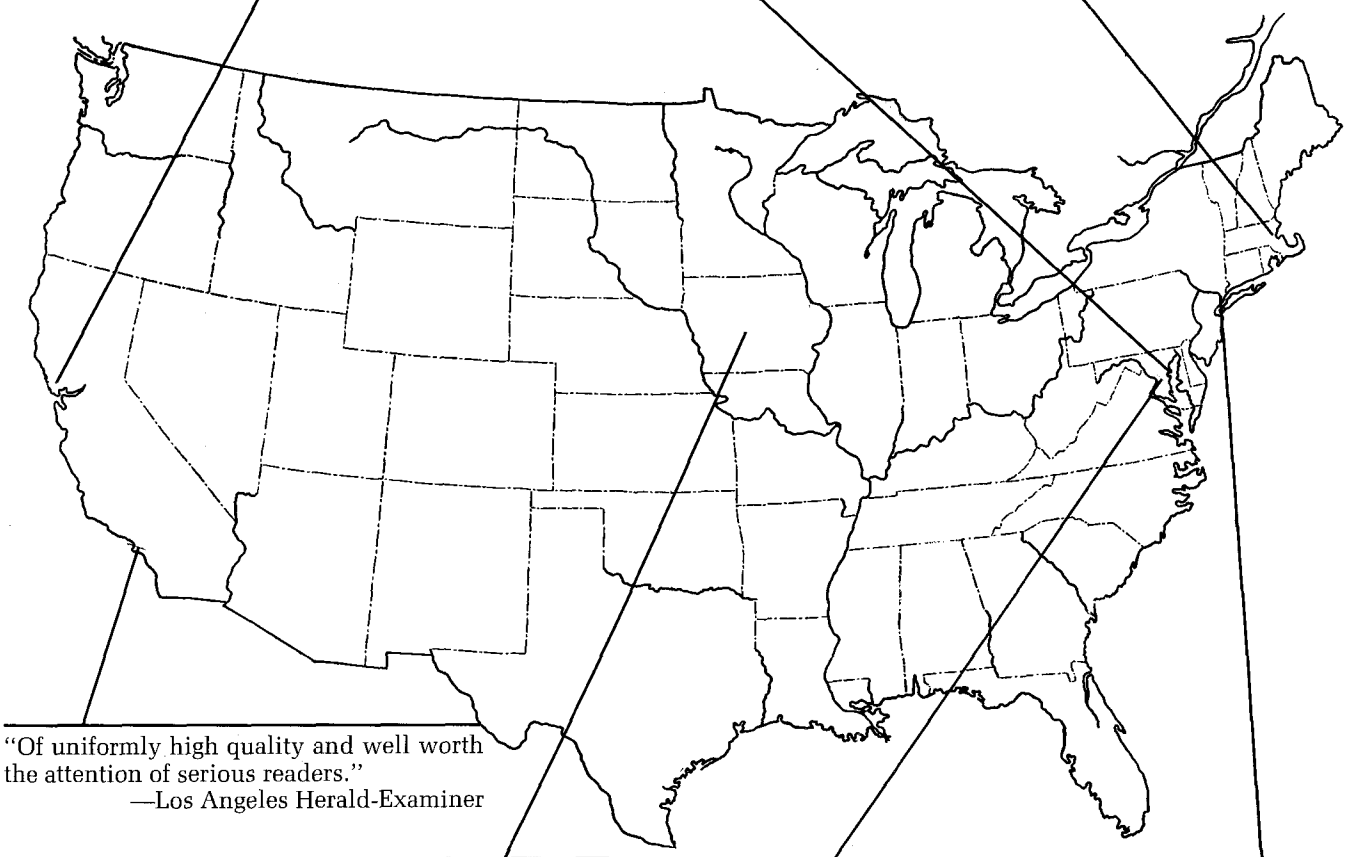

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A Villa in Tuscany

We found our villa as we've found other European habitations, by looking in the classified ads of a few London papers. The British know where to live, perhaps because they must get out of their gray island at least once a year to lighten their souls. Or, because they often don't have too much money, they discover the obscure and less overrun parts of Europe. They find, for example, a 400-year old stone peasant cottage and wire it and install luxurious plumbing and keep it looking on the outside just like the other cottages that don't have those amenities. That describes the Dordogne house, in a village of about 45 people, where we spent a month in 1970, short drives away from neglected treasures of Romanesque art. And it describes just as well the farm in the Cotswolds where we spent three weeks in 1973, short drives away from relatively unvisited treasures of Gothic art. And last summer's villa in Tuscany, where we spent two weeks in what are called the Sienese hills, in the hill town of Montepulciano—our most extraordinary visit to date, although the briefest. In short, the places where the British locate—the places they advertise in the London papers, the places one can rent from them—are very nearly guaranteed to be sunny, remote, clean, comfortable, authentic, private, and esthetically thrilling.

The business part is all done, however, riskily—on long-distance phone, and through the medium of photographs. "On receipt of the photographs, we'll send the deposit by return mail," we say; and then we send the money. Some year, no doubt, some clever con artist will send us two photographs of a baronial castle owned by someone else—someone who never dreamed of renting it out—and we will send our bank check, pack our bags, renew our passports, fly 4000 miles, rent a car, and pull up at the end of a majestic winding drive to find that we are not expected at all. The baroness will be very pleasant, albeit initially confused; she will assure us she knows no one with the name the con artist used—has received no money—doesn't (alas) rent rooms—and isn't it a great pity that we came so far. *So credulously.*

This nightmare has never in fact occurred, but it was certainly one of the scenarios in my mind the night we left the States for Italy and our Montepulciano villa, and the next day as the little Fiat that we'd rented at Fiumicino carefully edged through the crowds of the elderly spilling into the streets of Chianciano Terme, a health spa. On the map, our villa was supposed to be located well beyond Chianciano. In geographic reality it looked as if it might run into the spa and be exactly like it: that is to say hot, dense, noisy, crowded, and ugly. We didn't speak, neither of us wishing to voice the fear that Montepulciano had grown grotesquely since we had last been there, and that this time we had lost out.

Montepulciano is a hill village in Tuscany where we ate dinner one night sixteen years ago, my husband and I and his parents. George and Flo were making their first trip to Italy, and David and I were young students who had been living (splendidly) in Rome on under $5000 a year. We took them on a tour of Umbria and Tuscany, and one late afternoon we drove up a long narrow street and stopped at its only wide point (confused impression of distinguished buildings) to ask a native where to eat. The dinner was memorable on many counts: we ate turkey cutlets—cooked like veal, thinly sliced and sautéed in butter; we ate Swiss chard treated like salad, cooked and chilled with oil-and-vinegar dressing; and we drank the dark, slightly musty wine of the region, *Vino nobile*—noble wine—of Montepulciano. On the basis of these associations, and because of its location—on the hunch that it would still be itself—we had chosen a villa there. Perhaps it was mad, but as it turned out, we were justified by events. The Fiat pulled up and out of Chianciano Terme, swung around a hill behind which the spa vanished completely, entered real country again, and eventually pulled up a steep gravel drive. Behind a grille that barred our way was high, bright stucco whiteness, a broad terrace, carved stone balustrades; dogs barked. An Italian woman called out from above, in lightly accented British English, "The Gullettes?" and the electronically-controlled grille slowly slid sideways to admit us.

The villa was grander than we had imagined it, and our separate house, which backed on it, was newly renovated, elegantly decorated, charming. We looked at one another—my husband, my son, and I—with muted, with disguised, delight. "How very pretty," we said to the signora, taking in the beautiful tile floors, the antique furniture and *objets*, the English fabrics. The house cost half what a house on the Cape or the Vineyard or the Maryland Shore would have cost, and the more we got to know it, the more perfect it seemed. "What luck," we said, hugging one another after the signora left. Even the things that make domestic life abroad a trial—tiny refrigerators, small work space, few utensils (the signs that the work of women is badly neglected, unimproved) were all ample here, we noticed gratefully. We planned to cook some dinners, since our intention was to live not like tourists but like inhabitants who happened to be on vacation. We were going to make ourselves at home.

In the mornings we often had breakfast at a white iron table set on the lawn, in the welcome shade of a vast linden tree. A lawn is a proud possession in Italy, where green is not a color one expects to see underfoot in summer, where too many stones have to be removed, where even when a lawn is established it takes daily watering to maintain it. Aristocratic Italians have had lawns for centuries, of course—the great villas all had their "tapis verts," their green carpets—but the foreign name reveals that it was not an indigenous idea.

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Breakfast is espresso, of course, with hot milk; the hard-crusted saltless bread of Italy, so much more like a peasant loaf than French bread is; jams of the region. Montepulciano's specialty—carrying, coincidentally, the name of our villa—is dried plum jam, "susine"—thick, dark and smooth. Iris Origo says it can be put up without sugar. Plums actually were ripening over our heads as we ate. Occasionally my son would have eggs. The Italians call the yolk "the red of the egg," and the yolks were indeed deeply orange, as if they came from some source more intensely chicken-like than ordinary American chickens. An omelette in Italy has a color that makes American omelettes look anemic.

There was a delicious place on the lawn to read after breakfast: a double swing with green upholstery and a green awning. One's face could be in the shade and one's legs getting tan, all in one effortless position. Over the course of our vacation, I read there all of Umberto Eco's *Il Nome della Rosa*, the fourteenth-century murder mystery that has become a best-seller, in part because it was written by one of Europe's best-known semioticians, but promotes an epistemology simple enough for anyone to understand. The idea that appearances are deceptive—that it is hard to read signs—dazzles the adolescent German monk who tells the story, but didn't strain my knowledge of Italian or my intellectual powers. Eco's story is set, however, at a time when much of the art that we were here to see was produced; the early fourteenth century, when the Siena and Orvieto cathedrals were built, and Arnolfo da Cambio and Giotto and the Pisani brothers were all working in our part of the world. Eco's heroes are Franciscans, and we were here to see was produced: the early again, in Assisi. His more dubious characters are often Benedictines, members of a far richer order, linked with the wickedness of the papal court, with the inquisition, with controlling the poor. We didn't yet know that there was a once rich Benedictine abbey—Monte Oliveto—secreted in the mountains of the Val d'Orcia, whose cloister was decorated, at a later period, by Sodoma and Luca Signorelli; but when we made our way around the switchbacks and saw its cypress-covered hill, I recalled how Guglielmo da Baskervilla, the hero, and Adso, his teenage disciple, had first come to the abbey where the murderous adventures take place, and what treasures and trouble they found.

The Val d'Orcia was our valley, the direction we went in when we didn't feel like encountering tourists at Arezzo or Perugia or Firenze or Cortona, which were all on the Val di Chiana side. The Val d'Orcia turned out to be full of Benedictine abbeys, poor now, having been dissolved, and possessing only what can't be moved: frescoes, or a carved portal, or two ninth-century capitals. In one place, a fast-talking, anxious, dedicated, middle-aged monk showed us into his ruinous cloister. "We redid the paving with concrete blocks," he said apologetically; "we won't be able to reëstablish the library because all the adjacent land is privately owned." Rebuilding was his whole life. But it was not a promising ruin, since almost nothing old was left. "Where would the scriptorium have been?" I asked, trying to recreate Eco's medieval setting, and using the Latin word he used. Without hesitation, the monk pointed to the second floor of a neighboring house. In both our minds, a ghostly vision of grandeur and loving craft hung there, unsettlingly, overlaying the real present. Neither of us wanted power; politics had no part in it; it was a hopeless esthetic vision solely.

To read about the fourteenth century in the morning prepared us in many ways for the wanderings of our twentieth-century days. It was the life of Benedict that Sodoma painted in all those frescoes at Monte Oliveto. The saint rescues a hoe that has fallen into a lake. He reproves monks for being gluttonous. He knows when someone is trying to poison him and refuses food. In his youth, like Francis so much later, he was worldly, but over family objections, again like Francis, he gave up his worldly garb and life and became a monk. He brings people back to life also. My favorite miracle, as an idea, was his getting the hoe to fly up out of the water and attach itself to the farmer's handle. That would certainly have had local appeal. As we traveled, we often saw the stylish black and white of Benedictine robes and the soft capuccino color of Franciscan robes. The Franciscans seem the most serious about the forms—more like Spaniards or like Vatican guards: at Giotto's church in Assisi they keep out men in shorts and women with bare arms, and they shush talkers.

But it isn't just picturesqueness that has survived. Eco's politics—the political wars he describes, the creation of the idea of heresy, the repression of the openly resentful—was not foreign to our life in the villa, to the country around us. On the other side of the garden, at the iron table, my husband chuckled from time to time over his translation of Dario Fo, laughing at his own cleverness as well as Fo's. Fo, famous all over Europe—England adored him ten years ago—is almost unknown in America. Actually, the New Haven Rep had done one of his plays about a year before, and while we were in Italy another opened on Broadway with Estelle Parsons. But he is not nearly as well known as he should be. Not only is he a socko dramatist, full of crazy business and unlikely situations, but he's a leftist political satirist with style. His genre is political farce: he can be sillier than Brecht, but he can also be less ideological, more free-swinging, off the wall.

Fo runs his own theater now, in a renovated building in Milan, but there were years when he was vulnerable, as an aggressive and successful leftist. His wife, the actress Franca Rame, who acts in his plays, was abducted in 1973 and beaten, and he was arrested in Sardinia on specious charges. Now he's an institution—everyone knows at least his name—and a cult. David met the owner of a small cafe who turned out to be a Fo scholar, who loaned him records of Fo's plays and corrected dates and details of Fo's already legendary life. And indeed one would want to know about a man who could be persecuted for his words in the first world, and about the country that could throw up persecutors who cared so much about theater. It was really no surprise that we should come upon a Fo scholar in ancient Montepulciano. Later we found a left bookstore—just beyond the city walls—called *Mille Fiori* (A Thousand Flowers)—a reference not to medieval tapestries but to Mao's momentary desire for pluralism. A phrase like that knits the fourteenth century to the twentieth. We were, as we knew, in Toscana Rossa, Red Tuscany. "Vota comunista," said the poster my son brought home with him. In Pienza a peace parade came through the fifteenth-century piazza:

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cheerleaders, the kind of brass band that always makes me want to cry; women and babies, middle-aged couples, all carrying the red flags. In Comiso, Sicily, the peace-campers were getting arrested outside the future Cruise Missile installation. At the airports, troopers carrying Israeli-made Uzis, the best sub-machine gun in the world, were guarding the buildings from terrorists that Italy didn't have (according to one friend who has lived in Rome for twenty years) before its restrictive post-1968 laws against political activism.

When we looked up from our books, we saw only our own enclosed garden with its Edenic flowerings, and the hill rising up beyond the garden, with the 2500 little trees that our landlords had planted to be on the safe side. But by gaining only a little more height, we could see the whole of Montepulciano. We were outside the town, detached from it by a valley and elevated enough to see it all unobscured. We could see the long sloping ridge along which it lies, the silhouettes of cypresses outlining the hill on the left, the dark stripe of trees at what we later found to be the public park, and—reading slowly to the right—the contours of stone houses with uneven roofs set at irregular angles. Below are the olive orchards and the fields of grapevines. When I looked out my window in the morning, or took my coffee on the porch, through the arch at the very left of my field of vision was the dome of San Biagio, the masterpiece of Antonio Sangallo the Elder. High Renaissance architecture may have produced nothing more graceful and elegant, anywhere in Italy. Its monks' house across the way, with its double arcades, was considered so beautiful that it was copied for the interior of the Fogg Museum in Cambridge. The church itself makes the Cancelleria in Rome, a much-admired Renaissance building, look broad and unarticulated. It makes the baroque churches of a generation later look bulky, jumbled, overdressed. It makes Florentine rustication look coarse. There probably was only a very short time in the course of Western architecture when this building could have been designed. It has pilasters (the most refined of vertical accents); it has a square tower (because the eye that curves up a dome loves it better after going over a

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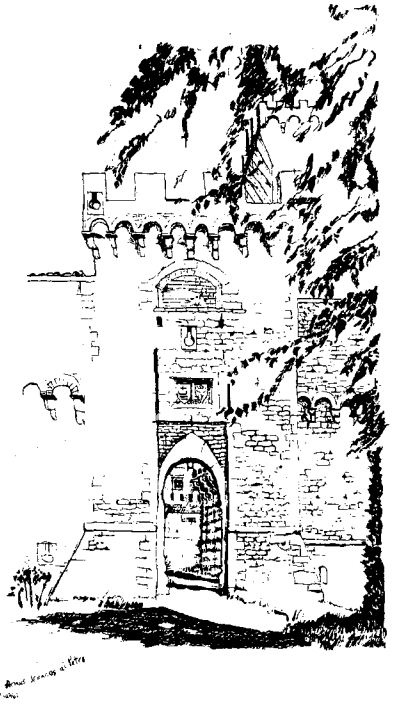
right angle to get there); and, unexpectedly, it has a low, comfortable stone bench that runs around the church itself and also around the tower. When you cross the big, dry field on which San Biagio rises, after your long journey thither, there will always be a cool seat in the shade for you.

The same sort of pilgrims' rest is available at the great Sangallo house on the main piazza, a house built on a scale that would lead an Italian speaker to call it a "palazzo." It too has a stone bench across the front, and since it is built along one side of the main piazza (the "wide place" of my faint recollection), where so much of town life goes on, the bench is very convenient. The palazzo was built in an era of solicitude for travelers, for pedestrians and watchers, for the young and the old. The palazzo is privately owned—our landlord at the villa told us he would introduce us to the proprietor, who is one of the "top people" in town and a friend of his—but anyone can sit on the bench. The outside of a house is public property. Even the courtyard, as in the Roman palazzi, may be public, in the sense that one can walk into it and look around. Inside, there may be a fountain, bas reliefs, a pillared loggia—it may be unimaginably beautiful, like the Palazzo Maffei in Rome, where my husband took Italian lessons sixteen years ago. A courtyard is an inside that is really an outside, like a throat. The *true* inside the Italian guards jealously, behind heavy doors and high stuccoed walls. We didn't in fact believe that our landlord would introduce us into the Sangallo palazzo, and as people who feel they will be forever strangers to its inner splendor, we occasionally ate a gelato leaning our backs against the warm stones of its ground floor.

Sometimes the gelato is eaten at eleven o'clock, after one does the food shopping; sometimes at three, right after lunch; sometimes at five or six in the afternoon—a time when any well-bred American would decline to "spoil his appetite," as my mother used to say. Since the Italians will not eat dinner for at least three hours, this is just as correct an hour as another. The gelati are remarkably good. Our son, who is sixteen and a fast study, declares that even the nationally manufactured brands are "better than Haägen-Dasz." Whether this is true or not, the local home-made ice creams are superb, and so it's delightful that there are so many appropriate times to eat them. At first, we narrowly watched the Italians to see whether we were gluttonously eating gelati at forbidden times, but it became apparent that there are no forbidden times.

Indeed, if there is something that unifies the Italian day, it is eating. People spend a long time at meals: often over two hours at what Americans rather diminutively call "lunch," and even more at dinnertime. My son, at a growing age, gained fifteen pounds that he was happy to add, and I gained ten that I wasn't. Partly it's that the food is so delectable and visually stimulating and also imaginative. If you're told that the specialty of the house is a roulade of lasagna-like dough filled with a flavored ricotta and spinach mixture, can you really turn it down? Or rabbit, flattened and grilled with rosemary? ("Che sciagura di essere senza coniglio," murmurs my husband, who knows that aside from me there can't be many people in the world to be amused by his learned pun, which requires that one have read *Candide*, know Italian, and love to eat rabbit.) Or there's a salad of



frutta da mare crammed with delicacies, like julienned squid and tiny octopi—a taste for which I acquired in one bite in Sicily, in the Lipari Islands, in March of 1967.

One day we found a working farm that had just opened a restaurant in the middle of its fields; it was built on a vast scale, but with the familiar features: pole beams, tile floors; the flags of Siena's regions were hanging from its walls. It was empty: we had discovered it. It was there that we found the roulade of ricotta. And wild boar. Their ragù was made with fresh boar sausage, and after our espressi, we went out to see their boars. They were in a grove of trees, penned in. Raising boars is rather shrewd for restaurateurs in this part of the world: boar meat is prized—quite rightly—and one used to come upon it only very rarely, mainly around Lago Bracciano, in whose forests wild boar were still hunted in the 'sixties. Boars, it turns out (I had never before seen one), are ugly brutes with dusty-gray quills swept back sideways as if electrified by their own ferocity. They have snouts like anteaters. In temperament these were quite docile and shy: they came close when we threw handfuls of grain over their fence; they scattered into the woods if we made sudden motions, all wheeling off together, like sheep.

One other reason we ate long, three-course lunches is that it was so hot. Italy is always hot in the early afternoon in the summer, but this summer brought the heat wave of the century. The mornings are comfortable enough, and the churches are always cool, but by one o'clock, particularly in a city, particularly in a heat wave, the only solution to the vexing combination of heat and fatigue is to sit quite still, and the natural way to do that if one is not at home is in a restaurant. It's also almost the only way to do it, because everything closes around the Mediterranean in the middle of the day. Stores close from 1:00 to 4:00 or even 5:00 P.M. Shopkeepers begin to look at their watches at one sharp, and by 1:05 the cities and towns are shut. Merchants lower their metal shutters, called saracens, and then the facades really do look helmeted and forbidding. Some museums are open, but if they're not well air-conditioned (and most of them are not), one might as well be dragging around stifling city streets.

Americans sometimes romanticize the leisureliness that they think makes a three- or four-hour break possible in a modern society, but it's a rather pitiless structure, not just for tourists but for many Italians themselves. What is one to do with all that

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time if one can't get home? In Rome in the winter we would occasionally see men bundled up, asleep in their cars. And it also makes the working day extremely long: women who work head home to their food-shopping and their families at 7:00 or 7:30. During these gruelling midday hours, the international adolescents sprawl on church steps, dazedly, with their luke warm mineral water and their picnic supplies and their cruelly heavy rucksacks. My first (rather maternal) reaction was to feel sorry for them; I had to remind myself that at that age and stage, on those same steps, I had felt like a Marco Polo, a Cortez. My son looked at them with envy and anticipation: three or four years from now he too will be there, eating juicy mozzarella di bufalo, the most refreshing of cheeses, and Hungarian-style salami, the most flavorful of dried meats, off a crusty roll, and napping with his head on his backpack. In the meantime, he made do with what money provides: exquisite settings, the iciness of *acqua minerale,* the stiffness of cloth napkins, our thoughtful deliberations over the menu and the wine, the rituals of service, the look of the dishes, the chefs' special expertise with desserts made of chocolate, and the cool sensation of not needing to move.

After lunch, we would slowly drive on slowly curving roads, toward some antique site with a euphonious name—Sant'Antimo, an eleventh-century church open for only an hour a day, or Montalcino, whose tiny museum houses medieval polychromed sculptures. Sometimes we drove only in search of sites for a drawing. It was in that way that we discovered a fifteeth-century walled castle, Domus Urbanos di Petro, still inhabited and worked as a farm, and the Castello Massaini, with its topiary trees and large stone undressed ladies, also a working farm and winery. Around every hill is another drawing-to-be, with stone walls, wedges of sun-baked fields, and something evergreen as an accent.

No Italians are out in these bleached hours. The air is very pale, and although it hangs like thin veils, almost transparent, these many veils are heavy. We moved in a kind of physical stupor, leaning as the car banked, and almost silent, but I knew myself to be awake through the eyes. I felt each of us watching, not alert in any tense way, because we knew we would find what we came here to seek. We were serene, like people watching a movie they knew would last as long as they liked. A silent movie. The frames are held longer than usual, as if this movie were shot by an early cinematographer, someone with no idea of the hasty appetites of the late twentieth-century, who knew that length is love.

Every day as we drove around, the land became more parched, especially in the Val d'Orcia. The river—the Orcia—had become no more than a path of gravel, with a few shallow pools only inches deep. The hills were mostly stubble of wheat and ploughed land. The ground is ploughed deeply, at least at first, and since it's clay soil the pieces are boulder-sized, and dried out by the sun. A hill that has been newly ploughed looks like the lunar landscape. It has a chill bone-gray color, the driest color in the world. A little green corn was tasseling, but the spots of green—with one exception: sunflowers—were rare. Mostly the landscape was drying up. Each day it became more pale and indistinct, as if it were slowly vanishing.

Out of this languor and drought we came one day to Bagno Vignoni, one of the hot sulphur baths. The town itself has had baths from the Middle Ages; Francis himself, and Catherine of Siena, whose emblem is the wheel, are supposed to have bathed in the old abandoned pool, now covered with scum. The pool of the new hotel, whose water constantly pours in, constantly changing, is high up on a hillside. From its terrace, one can see the broad flank of the next hill, with just two or three small stone farmhouses dotting it—and below, a stream with real water, of that rare blue that makes one want to shout. Only a handful of people are here to notice this view: an emaciated, immensely chic German couple, a few well-bred Italian families. Over the murmur of voices one can hear the water falling into the pool. It's like a private spa; admission: $2.00. Once again, as so often, we had that feeling, so much more frequent in Italy than anywhere else, that luck was with us, that things were turning out better than we had any right to expect. The water falls out of a chute, at one end of the pool, above the heads of those standing under it. The water is milky, but not sulphurous—it's heavy, blue-tinted water. People wait in line for their turn under the hot, heavy fall, either because they have arthritis or bursitis or some other ailment for which doctors prescribe sulphur baths, or (our case) because they find they love hot outdoor showers of creamy water. At first the shower seems too hot to bear. But gradually one bears it. Grinning and bearing it. Trying not to grin and loving it. Trying to look as if one didn't see all those other people waiting on line. As one moves away from the fall, the water becomes more tepid and less turbulent. At Bagno Vignoni there's an artificial island in the middle of the vast pool, and under the bridge to the island the water is almost cool. One teases oneself by swimming back and forth under the bridge, into the coolness and out. Those who have been in a Jacuzzi have some very slight idea of what this experience is like. It is certainly one of the most voluptuous experiences in the world. And this part of Italy is full of hot water gushing out of rocks. Our well-traveled friends Victor and Judith had told us about a falls that forms a natural pool by the side of a road. No admission charge at all. Nature's Jacuzzi.

By five o'clock, in the country, the air is cooling and the light is changing. It has a new clarity. Wherever you happen to be, people begin to come out again. The baling machines, left stockstill in the middle of the fields in the middle of the day, start rolling the hay into wheels again. The tractors roll, leaving their lunar wake. In the hill-towns, the antique-dealers put their best chair out in the street and sit in it, thus signalling that they are open for business and have useful and beautiful wares. The greengrocers' sons lug the cases of fruits and vegetables out onto the street again. In the cities, the saracens clang up, and the tourists mob the shops. From a high vantage point in any town, one can see the empty streets fill, an almost comical sight.

We had such a view—and a view of much else—in Montepulciano, and, as it happened, from the terrace of the Sangallo palazzo on the piazza, the one on whose stone bench we had loitered as strangers several weeks before. Our landlord spoke to his friend, and his friend kindly invited us and gave us a tour of the whole establishment. He's a vintner, whose

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family has been producing wine for at least 150 years. He speaks the most perfect Italian I've ever heard, every double consonant audible, every syllable distinguished from the rest. The Italian word for this achievement in speech is "clean" ("pulito"), which struck me as odd until I realized that we too say someone speaks "impeccably." Cleanliness in speech must be a universally desirable quality. The Italian spoken in what we by then were thinking of as "our" part of Italy is known to be the cleanest. "Lingua romana in bocca toscana" is the complacent local saying. All it means is "Italian tongue in Tuscan mouth," but the idea is that a mouth from any other region doesn't quite make it. Speaking the language properly is no casual matter, in Italy. An accent is a class and regional shibboleth—not quite as devastatingly as in England, but certainly much more than in present-day America. Now that regionalism, like ethnicity, is in, few Americans try to wipe out every trace of where they came from; some even cultivate their accents. In Italy, where extremes of poverty and wealth are still geographically distributed, some accents are jokes, and many are considered "provincial."

The winery is below the palazzo, carved into the hillside forty feet down. On the lowest level are the presses, on the next highest floor the casks, then the offices and the shop, and the palazzo above all the rest. All these lower rooms were carved out of the rock. It is so cool down here that they store the wine in casks, to mature it, a year longer than the law requires (three years instead of two). We lingered there longer than true curiosity inspired, enjoying the cold and inquiring about the Italian terms for wine-making processes. The word for pressing the grapes, we learned with interest, is the same word ("pigiare") that used to be used when it was done with feet. In a special room reserved for tasting wine, we drank a glass of the house white and a glass of the house red. By now we were familiar with many of the local wineries' products. We had come with a predilection for the noble wine, and we were leaving with a closer discrimination of its excellences. It is not known as well as it should be in the States, and even in Italy it is overshadowed by the closeness of the Chianti classico region and the rivalry of Montalcino's Brunello. *Vino nobile* is something like a Côte du rhône, but not so vociferous. It's quite smooth, and its mustiness grows on one. It's a wine to drink in a dark-panelled study. The room we were in was also appropriate—a long narrow room with one slender window, in feeling rather like a cell, with a monkish table in the middle and drawings of nineteenth-century carousers on the walls. The family's living-room, two floors above, is a high-ceilinged salon frescoed during the sixteenth century in cool greens and grays, picturing gardens and statues and twisted pillars and grave buildings.

Going upstairs, our host took us out into the real garden, a large space for so crowded a town, enclosed on three sides by the walls of his palazzo and those of other houses, but open like a theatre proscenium overlooking the lower parts of the town. We could see the ladies at the handmade copper shop sitting in the street outside the shop, and people walking up toward the main piazza for the passeggiata. The garden also overlooks the valley to the south—and there in the distance, to the right, was our villa. We thought we knew where it was, and our landlord confirmed the fact. Finding it like that was like a reversal of our first morning. Then we were acquisitive, longing out-

siders, dazed by the riches around us. On this day we were deep in Montepulciano historically; we had situated ourselves geologically and geographically; we were in full possession and enjoyment of the resources.

By six, the passeggiata begins. In their promenade the Italians express their happiness about evening. Americans sometimes wonder why Mediterraneans start to say "bon soir" or "buona sera" so early in the day. Sometimes people start saying "good evening" right after noon. It's not crazy. It's a kind of magic invocation, a hastening of the onset of coolness. The girls come out, walking arm in arm slowly along the main street. The boys come out, also often arm in arm. Mothers appear with babies in carriages. Men stand and gesticulate, looking as if they were arguing about politics. People stop and merge into groups and new groups form.

In Perugia the passeggiata starts at the main piazza where the Pisani brothers carved a fountain shortly after 1300 (but it's not nearly of the quality of the figures they carved on the front of Orvieto cathedral) and goes almost to the overlook where the steet ends. In Cortona the passeggiata begins at the piazza with the loggia and goes to Piazza Garibaldi, another overlook. In Siena, the high street runs parallel to the Piazza Grande. In San Gimignano, "the Manhattan of Tuscany," it goes from the piazza with the most towers and fourteenth-century townhouses down the hill to the city gates. The towered piazza is where the Florentines and the knowledgeable internationals flee to as soon as the heat of the day cracks. To get a little table at the one cafe there, one should arrive early—and one should stay long enough to watch the facades turn gold.

All the streets where people walk have the nicest shops in town, or the grandest hotels or palazzi, but not very many people waste these precious hours going into the stores. Nor is the passeggiata a mere daily Easter parade. People dress for it, but for the most part unpretentiously. The girls who go to the University of Georgia at Cortona come out in versions of advanced couture (that summer there were floral jumpsuits of pedal-pusher length, and long square-cut tunics with twice-around belts, and short-skirted dresses over lacy eighteenth-century pantaloons, and loose floating fabrics knotted at the hems front and back like handkerchiefs). But nobody else—including the boys of the University of Georgia at Cortona, who wear jeans and t-shirts with the sleeves rolled up, and look like beats who go to hair stylists—comes for the

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passeggiata merely out of vanity. Nor is anyone going anywhere. In their promenade, people stroll; it is quite clear that they are not walking to get any place. Something more instinctual is at work. They are relaxed. They laugh and touch one another. They sit in cafes that often fill the street. They eat gelati in fantastic arrangements: sundaes with crisp rolled cookies a foot high—after all, dinner is not until nine. These are the hours of pleasure, the hours of leisure. All one's energy flows back after the listlessness of midday. Perhaps some process is furthering itself within this animal dormancy—my friend Lawrence Senelick calls the hours from one to five the "sieste de résistance"—but one is not conscious in any ordinary way during this time. As one endures them, these are lost hours, but in retrospect they seem to be necessary for what follows.

By five one wakes, as if kissed by the cool lips of the prince; by six one is revived and restored; by seven one is witty; by eight profound. By dinnertime one is all things to all people, incomparable, a demiurge. The breeze blows, the light is bluing, at some point much later on, the moon rises—a soft-faced giddy moon. Food has never tasted so flavorful, wine has never been so vital. After eleven, clear-headed in the sane air, all the stars visible, one feels that every moment extends one's happiness infinitely. This is the most exquisite feature of the Italian double day, which is itself a sort of miracle. Technically, of course, it is possible elsewhere—insofar as it depends on geography, climatic conditions, and the summer season. But the mere pedestrian sequence of stifling afternoons and cool evenings does not give one the sense of eternal life, as anyone who has spent a day in Chetumal or Casablanca knows. There's an allegory of the life course in Italy, with noon standing for somnolent, unawakened youth, and evening being vigorous, joyful middle-age, that seems as if it could go on forever. And this happens in Italy day after day—one can count on it. Doubling one's life is the closest that any of us is going to get to feeling immortal. But life has to be precious before one cares to have it doubled, and what makes it precious is what the Tuscan summer provides.

—Margaret Morganroth Gullette

CUTTINGS

Winning

The fuss over the Olympics spurred me to give some thought to heroes, nations, and the business of winning. It has taken me some fifty years to swallow the reality that winning is a business. Whether or not I'll live to digest it is another matter. I was born too early.

The Boy Allies were not a business, nor did Tom Swift make any money that I recall, though he was a veritable Edison when it came to inventions. It can be held that Robin Hood (Robbing Hood as my cousin with the sticking-out teeth called him) was in business, since what he took from the rich and gave to the poor was money. "Worldly goods" the minister called it, and he didn't seem to like them at all though he wanted us to share them with the poor. Which is what Robin Hood did, so it was less a business than God's work. And as for King Arthur and his knights, well, nobody ever took a dime for all the deeds they did, especially not Gawain, who in one story didn't even take a kiss when it was offered. There was, of course, the Dempsey-Tunney affair, which was a big thing in our town and my father went, I think, to Philadelphia to see one of the fights, and I was pretty excitable in the arguments, on the side of the champion. I was always on the side of the champion though I don't see why since I lost almost every fight I ever got into. I suppose being champion meant something else to me. Anyway, you didn't win to become a champion; you won because you *were* a champion.

Certainly this attitude modified as I grew up. I mean, I *did* grow up. Ulysses was too tricky and Achilles too puffed up, though I couldn't shift my allegiance to Hector because I was rooting for the Greeks. Just as I was rooting for Ruth and Gehrig and the Yankees, and didn't like close games. Twelve to nothing with Ruffing was just about right for me. I did accept, rather easily I now perceive, the fact that The Crusades were a business venture. But Perseus was wonderful (anyone who chopped at snakes was wonderful) and all those women of Greek legend were terrible, the ones who were always killing their children because their husbands did something they didn't like. It might well have put me off women if I had yet been onto them.

In college I rooted for Plato against Aristotle, Nietzsche against Schopenhauer, anybody against Kant. And, interestingly because he lost, Montezuma against Cortez (Cortez was a sneaky devil who'd do anything to win). Still, an element of rationality was creeping in; the door was opened in my mind. But remained shut in my heart. The good guy must win. Not the better man. The *better* man. Such is the curse of the idealist, which I came at first proudly to sense that I was. Only later did I recognize what I was stuck with.

By the time I graduated college I had come to realize that champions were a mixed bag, and worse yet, that many of them were simply landed with the job, often for no better reason than the whim of a king or fairy godmother. Of course, there were heroes for love—Abelard's channel-swim was certainly impressive—but that seemed to be an offbeat event, like hurdles. Heroes *against* love—like Ibsen's women—were more in the old straightforward mold. As for political figures, they were champs-for-a-day, or until the second biography about them came out. You had to enjoy them fast, like ice-cream.

Hollywood was some help. The old star system created champions and kept them going mile after mile (feat after feat?). Jimmy Stewart, Gary Cooper, John Wayne. You could count on them to stand up for you against the forces of meanness. (Old-fashioned evil was not often to be seen; it hadn't come through The Age of Reason in very good shape.) Humphrey Bogart too, though he was what's called a transitional figure, which means things are getting spotty. Bogart projected no taste for

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RICHARD ROBBINS

AFTER THE MIRACLE

A gate in the spine open, muscles there
gone slack as clothesline, finally and now
strangely your back doesn't exist, the pain
swept away as cleanly as the factory's

acid air once the wind shifts. You sit,
remembering tightness, the way it drew
all of you to its center, distracting
any motion, any other thought. After

the miracle, after the all of you
focused inward suddenly disappeared,
what was there left but doubt in the new walk
and restored axis? Fearing ease, braced

for the wrong step that would freeze you to your
spasm—come home again, familiar—
what was the yard and house but background again
to inward attention, this time on absence,

on the emptiness of you without pain,
while the dumb flesh spread out, and body hair
twisted toward light, and grass filled the yard,
and lawn, trees, and gate opened to the street?

the job of champion. He always looked as if he'd swallowed the Listerine. And sure enough, that came to be the look of the modern champ of film and story—the celebrated anti-hero. *L'héros malgré lui*. James Dean. Marlon Brando. Robert Duvall. Robert Everyman. The ordinary guy as champion. For Warhol's fifteen minutes. This is democracy, and democracy has a lot to do with winning but not much with the better man. It has to do with consensual man and woman, the ordinary guy. Much more convincing as anti-hero, considering the life lived by most ordinary guys and gals. But once in a while they can rise up and win one. So nowadays being a champion is often a simple matter of winning once at anything, anywhere. And a number of contemporary heroes don't have to win anything at all; they're born out of Media's ear.

So, as often with modern life, traditional standards abandoned, the game is up for grabs. Historically, up for grabs equals gimmicks. Even with the Greeks. Ten whole years of war and it's decided by a wooden horse? Phui. Anyway, when it comes down to a matter of gimmicks, it's not the hero who decides championships, it's his "handler." Heroes aren't known for big brains. In fact, they're necessarily so single-minded, with that one bee in their bonnet, that consuming quest, that they can't see an inch to the left or right, let alone behind them. But the handlers! The managers, agents, lawyers, PR people! The wily ones. They couldn't beat their mother in a fair fight, but sell her to a sultan, you bet. And make her think it was what she always wanted, compared to Dad in red polyester pants at the TV watching football. Presumably he's watching heroes, winners. Except it now seems that maybe half of them are on something, chemical heroes, and what kind of business is that? I mean, if you looked Medusa full in the face you got turned to stone. But if you were stoned already, then what? Or . . . if like them you're a hero and an outlaw at the same time, but not like Robin Hood, for the good of the poor? You don't even have to steal the money from the rich, they give it to you. The Holy Grail is a million a year plus endorsements, and you get it whether or not you rescue a soul all year long.

In short, the business of winning is business. From the little leagues to the Olympics. Which corrupts the country, but more importantly puts me in a ridiculous position. I can't stop rooting just because there's nothing worth rooting for. The fact is that you root because you're a rooter, it's built in. The further fact is, therefore, that the particular hero or champion never was the real object of it all. They were just tools in the business of winning, or at least not losing. Winning may not be all, but losing is damned depressing. Your support should not be powerless, by God! You don't find me sitting willingly at a performance of *Camille*. I'll probably be watching a rerun of a John Wayne western. Or maybe a Woody Allen, where at least there's a chance he might win, or if he doesn't you can see it's all a big joke anyway.

—Kenneth Lash

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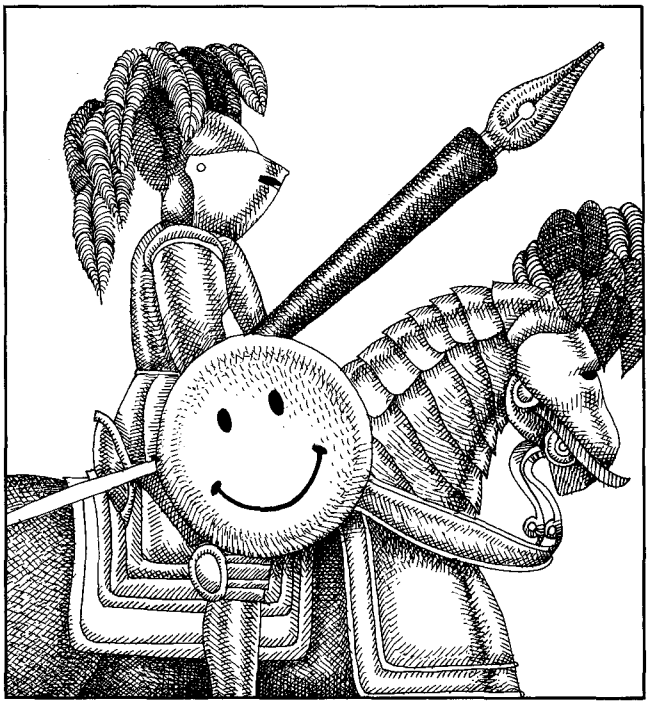
MARCHING TO BYZANTIUM

PETER CORODIMAS



"Bring the television cameras right in," I said to the crew standing outside the gymnasium door. Behind them part of the Manhattan skyline rose into a hazy drizzle. I leaned over my desk and touched a buzzer. "Mr. Crawford will be here shortly."

I thought it premature for our group to appear on television, and I continue to think so. Some days back, I had said to Adrian Crawford, our Special Projects Director, "Sure, we've had some remarkable successes with the program." (Just that morning I had seen him scatter a team of encyclopedia salesmen with a dozen lines from Milton.) "But we need more experience before going public. This thing has to be properly harnessed. You must admit, there have been some notable failures, and the risks—"

"Risks make the world go round," Crawford said. "But I appreciate your input, Grogan." Then he quoted a Ferlinghetti poem about the poet as high-wire specialist. "As you well know," he said, "that poem deals with the need—nay the *necessity*—of the artist to take risks, upside risks as well as downside."

"I agree," I said, "in part." And then I countered with two lines from Yeats' "The Fascination of What's Difficult." I also reminded him of what happened when Bill Keasling tried to recite Amy Lowell's "Patterns" to five Lebanese terrorists who were holed up in the Trade Center. They held him by one ankle from a top-story window until he lost track of his cadence and his lips stopped moving. Although Keasling escaped with his life, he later developed phobias toward pita bread and cedar hedges, and had to retire early.

Crawford adjusted a button on his blue blazer and nodded. "I haven't forgotten Keasling," he said. "He was one of my best. But Keasling forgot about the language barrier. He was foolish to go in without a translator, even though something would have been lost."

"What about Sven Knudsen?" I asked.

Knudsen had got himself banged up pretty badly by a gang of subway toughs who had been operating out of Grand Central. When Knudsen caught on to their pattern, he went after them with copies of Rod McKuen.

"Mm-hmm," said Crawford, tamping his thumb into his smoldering pipe. "What *about* Knudsen? Didn't he later admit choosing the wrong poetry for the occasion? Had he been authorized to use McKuen?" Crawford waved his pipe in the air. "He's young, this Knudsen: that's the problem. He's bound to make mistakes. But he's strong and he's learning."

"Still," I said, recalling the week Knudsen had spent in the hospital.

Crawford sighed and shrugged and dashed off a line from Kipling's "If."

". . . No, indeed," Crawford was saying to the television people. "Pegasus does not take kindly to saddles. Still in all"—he glanced in my direction—"what can a man do but try?"

At six-feet-four, Crawford towered above the interviewer. His dark eyes blinked into the lights. He tucked his crimson horsehead-patterned tie into his blazer just as the cameras whirred into action. The interviewer asked him about his background. Crawford explained he had done a brief stint as a college president back in the 'sixties. He mentioned his Green Beret experience, his nineteen books devoted to the nature of poetry. A crew member in a dark sweater coughed; another snickered. A smile unsmoothed Crawford's face and he shifted his body in the black vinyl chair, but he continued talking even as his eyes searched behind the cameras.

Crawford was not used to being underestimated, not to mention laughed at. I knew his fine tuning made him capable of bursting into poetry when one least expected

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it, sometimes with devastating results. I wanted to prevent that from happening, if I could.

The interviewer, a tentative thin-faced man wearing a wrinkled brown suit, shuffled his notes. "So let's talk about P.O.P. itself," he said. "What can you tell us about the nature of the organization?"

"Well," said Crawford. "To begin with, we prefer to be called 'Power of Poetry, Incorporated.' The explosiveness of the acronym hasn't escaped us, of course. But all the same, it seems a little ostentatious, and so we voted not to use it."

The interviewer glanced at Crawford's signet ring. "Okay, then. But what is it you fellows actually *do*?"

"It's simple," Crawford said. "A decade ago the president and founder of our company, Sinclair T. S. Chipulina, had a recurring nightmare that even in the twentieth century, with all its advances, it was *still* possible for people to live and die without once having heard a poem by Joyce Kilmer, let's say, or Alexander Pope. In this ugly dream he saw people expiring faster than parking meters—people who in all probability had heard nothing better all their lives than ad-agency jingles. Upon waking he often bemoaned the fact that in other countries, particularly third-world, things were even worse. There, people existed whose ears might never thrill to the bare mention of a Lord Byron or a Sara Teasdale. His realization, in short, led to Power of Poetry, Incorporated—which is just now, after something like five years, starting to form branch offices in other parts of the world. Because our founder was a man of vision as well as a man of considerable means, he set aside generous funds for experimentation. Our particular group is one of those experiments. We like what our parent organization is doing—funding poetry readings, establishing endowments, dropping poetry leaflets, helping the small presses, encouraging prize competitions. . . . Hell, we fully endorse those activities. But we—*here,* here in this splendidly renovated gymnasium—pursue our own *raison d'être,* and *who can predict the consequences!*"

The interviewer watched Crawford tap his pipe against the side of a turquoise ashtray.

"Our group," Crawford continued, "believes in taking poetry directly to the people whenever and wherever it can."

"And believes in the use of force?" added the interviewer.

"Who can predict what happens when someone is chased down by the right poem? The universe holds its breath during such moments."

The interviewer leaned forward to say something, but Crawford spoke more rapidly: "Our methods may be unorthodox, but who can argue with the results?" Crawford reached behind the chair for a chart. His fingers traced the rising lines of a multi-colored graph. "Fifty-seven people directly affected by poetry in a single month: you'll have to agree that's not bad. Plato and Aristotle and Horace—they all knew poetry could *move* people in the best of all possible directions (Plato, of course, would take exception to my word *best*). The medieval world tended to lose sight of this fact: it took the Renaissance Man to rediscover the truth."

"But I'm told," said the interviewer, raising his voice, "that on occasion your group almost resorts to guerrilla tactics. What do you say about that?"

Crawford cleared his throat and said, "Tut, tut, there's no *almost* about it. We *are* guerrillas, and our poetry makes us the best-equipped guerrilla force in the world. When you have the conviction of a favorite poem behind you, nothing can stand in your way. And don't forget: of those fifty-seven people we got to last month—many of whom were murderers and rapists and general overall thugs—nearly forty of them were right here in New York, where our members feel most needed."

"I seem to recall a comment by W.H. Auden that poetry never really accomplished—"

"That's one man's opinion," Crawford said, "and I happen not to accept it. If you can somehow get the poetry to the people, you're going to change their lives."

"Like soothing the savage beast? Is that the idea?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes."

"But how do you measure susceptibility? How do you decide on the best poem for a potential convert?"

"Obviously you need to do your homework," Crawford said. "It's all in my books."

Squinting toward the camera, the interviewer said, "I understand that you intend to demonstrate your theories later this evening."

"Absolutely," said Crawford. "Central Park is already targeted." He glanced at the fan window above the door. "When it's dark enough you'll have ample demonstration."

I got up and wandered about the newly-varnished gym among the discarded bullworkers and the faint smells of rosin and sweat and liniment. Poets framed in distressed walnut looked down from the walls. Most of our members had left for supper, some on assignment, others just to take a night off before starting their countdown. Tilman Potter, a balding librarian from New Jersey, grunted over his leg presses without seeing me pass by. In a day or so he would be off to Boston's Combat Zone to investigate complaints involving tourists who had been harrassed on their way to Chinatown. I had no idea what poetry he planned to employ: that was Crawford's department, and he was keeping this one a secret.

I paused to watch Mike Brodzinski complete some chin-ups. He saw me and smiled a crooked smile. Then, wheezing a little, he switched to one hand and raised his unshaven chin over the bar three times. "Good," I said. "Damn good." Brodzinski's specialty was leapers, potential suicides: his success rate, using Walt Whitman to bring them in off lime-splotched ledges and windy girders, had climbed to 91%. There had been talk that Crawford also wanted to use Brodzinski in the new rehabilitation program for retired athletes, a program heavily laced with poetry by Robert Service and, here and there, dashes of Tennyson and Browning.

I took a drink at the humming fountain and stared into the words *Warren, Ohio*: the cold water made my teeth ache. I asked Brodzinski if he was taking part in the television demonstration later this evening.

"No way," he said, popping sunflower seeds into his mouth. "This one's Mr. Crawford's baby."

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"Oh, really?" I should have known Crawford had something up his sleeve: he could recite poetry with the best of them. All the same I was surprised. He was a master tactician, and I knew his voice would bear up under stress. But I was worried about his physical conditioning.

By the time I returned, Crawford was holding his unlit curve-stemmed Meerschaum in his mouth with the bowl inverted, a sure sign that the interview was nearly over. But he still summoned words without effort, deep and resonant words that drew my attention even though I had agrued poetic theory with him dozens of times and therefore already knew his approaches to poetry. Easing the pipe from his mouth he talked a few minutes longer about the force of language—its rhythms and rhymes, its incantatory dimension, its symbolic nature, its shifting connotations. He quoted nursery rhymes; he produced a ninety-one word palindrome I had never heard before. At one point he said, "Poetry is a moment's ecstasy ensnared in words; however, they have to be the right words in the right order."

I said, "Mr. Crawford, it looks like darkness has settled in."

"Ah," he said, "and are all night's candles burnt out?"

"It's pretty dark," I said.

Crawford slapped his knees and said, "Then let's get our asses in gear."

I waited for Crawford to cover his brass blazer-buttons with electrical tape. When he finished, he kicked a medicine ball across the gym floor. He said, "Grogan, what do you think about my dedicating tonight's work to the memory of Algernon Swinburne?"

I said, "It's up to you, Adrian; you're the one taking the risks," and then, with the television crew riding in a van behind us, we set out for Central Park.

We entered the park at 65th Street shortly after 10:00. Crawford slipped out of the car as soon as I cut the lights and motor. He dropped to one knee, sniffed the September darkness, and said, "Life tends toward one moment." Then he was off, body low to the damp ground, the television people and I following from a safe distance. For a while we lost sight of him. Then, minutes later, he re-appeared beside me, touched my arm and whispered: "I've spotted a mugger—alert the camera man."

"Be careful," I said.

In moments we heard Crawford's muffled cry for help, actually a signal to position the camera, and we went toward the sound. A man in a motorcycle jacket had Crawford in a headlock and was saying, "Shit, man, I just want some of your money." And then Crawford's rich baritone rang out with the opening stanza of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind."

"Hey!" said the thug.

But Crawford, smiling, moved right into the second stanza, and we could see the man loosening his grip. The next two stanzas were magnificent. Several of the television people started to clap. "There's more," I said. When Crawford got to the last line—"If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"—the thug was blinking back tears. His arms hung limply at his side. Crawford handed him one of our cards and said, "You don't have to face adversity without poetry. Call this number when you need more." Crawford faced the camera for a closeup and read the number out loud. "That goes for any of you," he said.

Crawford's cheek was bleeding a little. I took a band-aid from my pocket and handed it to him.

"Thanks," he said.

"Your reading could not have been any better," I told him.

But he barely heard me. "This next one's for Sir Philip Sidney," he muttered, and then he was off in a soft rustle of bushes.

The interviewer came over and shined a small flashlight in my face. "What's up now?" he asked.

"I'm not sure," I said.

"Is there more?"

"I guess so."

There was in fact a great deal more. The night came alive with poetry. Emily Dickinson soared above the tree tops . . . Wallace Stevens . . . A. E. Housman . . . Crawford was everywhere. He cornered two more thugs within the hour. He nabbed a third over by the children's zoo. A little past midnight he sent a rapist stumbling toward the nearest police station. Crawford had disguised himself in a dress, hunching over to conceal his height; when the rapist struck, Crawford yanked the silk stocking from the man's face, pinned his arms, and recited a hard-hitting sonnet by John Donne.

The camera ground away. Crawford, now a mere shadow with a loose band-aid flapping from his face, duckwalked by, breathing heavily. A thick crust of mud had formed around his shoes. He shouted a line of poetry from William Blake that sounded like a peal of thunder.

"Ease the mainsheet," I called after him.

"What's happening?" asked a television man.

We tried to keep up.

Soon he was outside the park. We saw him halt a robbery near the Metropolitan Museum. Then he was off again, quoting Rilke.

"Slow down," I said. "Stop!" I cut across the street and tried to run alongside him. "The body is a fragile vessel," I said.

"Unless soul clap its hands," he snorted, and ran ahead.

I cupped my hands to my mouth. "Yeats!" I yelled, deliberately rhyming the word with *Keats*. Crawford stumbled as if a leg had been shot out from under him. I misquoted the opening of Shakespeare's Sonnet 73. Crawford buckled, he fell against a mailbox.

"Hurry," I said to the TV crew, "we might be able to stop him."

But Crawford had already recovered. If anything, he was stronger. He ran, hurling iambs and dactyls into the empty streets ahead. We stopped, knowing we could not keep up. I think we also knew—those of us who stood trembling in the wake of Crawford's poetry and watched him disappear—we knew how such stories inevitably went: We would never see Crawford or his kind again. There would be Crawford's postcard from Caracas, some weeks later, asking when the program would be aired, and on what channel. And then there would be silence. □

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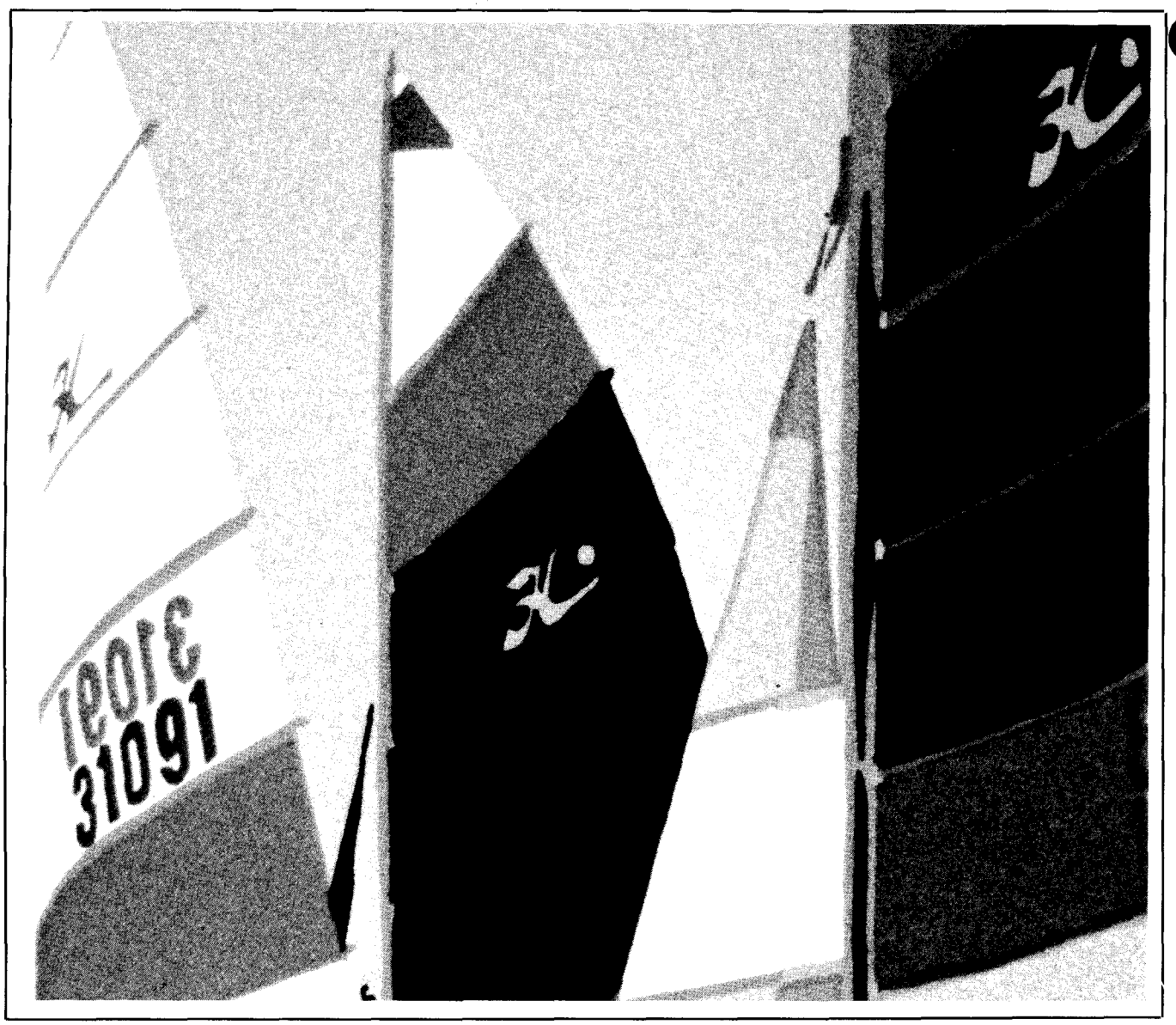
THE SPIRIT OF THE GROVE

DAVID HELLERSTEIN



A dancing afternoon.

The sun blazes, the Sound is full of hundreds of sailboats and sleek cabin cruisers and little outboards with narrow handmade cabins, and a little plane that zooms over the horizon, from beyond the tiny Robert Moses Bridge five miles away, bearing down on us with a message from the heavens: *Crazy Eddies! Best Prices in Town!*

We're on the top deck of the *Merrimac II*, Dyan and I, luggage at our feet. Across from us, three men in black leather costumes, very gay, very sweaty, talk intently to a woman with a shaved head. They all hold plastic cups with little parasols floating in pink drinks. And up at the bow, a man with dyed hair and a t-shirt full of safety pins is chatting to a cropped man. Two black Dobermans pant at their feet.

I'm struck by the thought that we're in costume too: Dyan in her flower-print summer dress, me in my tie and blazer, a suburban couple waylaid from LaGuardia Airport, carried unwittingly into some summer version of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show."

"Are we on the right boat?" Dyan whispers.

"Good question," I say. I whisper too. "I never could understand why Dad and Smokey come here. Not exactly their kind of people."

"They give me the creeps," she says. Dyan is sulking. My arm is around her, but she pulls away, and finally I take my arm down. Somehow I think I wanted her to be impressed by the Island; but we're not even there yet and she's already decided she doesn't like it. Or me, I'm afraid.

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The boat is making a wide arc in the water, and now we can see the whole town gleaming before us, the flash of sun on sliding glass doors, the shine of new paint on a white bell tower, a hundred little wooden houses on low dunes.

There is a bright, glittering crowd of people on the pier.

"There they are," I say.

A sunburnt couple, heavy around the middle, wearing khaki shorts, brightly patterned shirts, they stand to one side of the crowd, with two rusted children's wagons at their feet: my father, my father's second wife. That is who they are but really it is hard to imagine that I'm related to them at all.

The boat squeals against the wooden pier; ropes are thrown over; people stand. The parasols move past, followed by the prancing, nervous Dobermans. I sit there, looking at my father, who even at this distance doesn't seem right, whose hands hang as heavily at his sides as tools on a nail.

Dyan, suddenly cheerful, jumps up.

"We're here!"

I follow her across the plywood gangway and into Smokey's arms.

"Hello, darlings!" says Smokey. "How was your flight?"

I introduce Dyan.

"Slim, say hello to Dyan. Dyan is Alex's nurse. Isn't that cozy? How's the practice?"

"Good," I say.

Smokey waves around the harbor. She's stout, elderly but vigorous, she looks like she'd be more at home on a tennis court in Great Neck than surrounded by a hundred gay men on a dock in Cherry Grove: but here she is.

"Spectacular!" she says. "Everyone dying of AIDS and God knows what else—and so many people still coming over. You're not afraid, are you?"

We load our belongings on the two old wagons, and I take one and Smokey wrestles the other out of Dyan's hand, and we walk off the dock, turn right at the outdoor cafe, and follow the long boardwalk.

"You're a doctor," Smokey calls from behind. "What do you think?"

"About what?"

"The mosquitoes," says Smokey. "Do they spread AIDS?"

I slow down. "There's no . . ." I begin.

My father, who has not been following the conversation, bangs his shin against the back of my wagon, and suddenly crumples like a man hit by a stray bullet and falls off the boardwalk. He lands on the sand a foot below. For a long stunned moment he lies unmoving, an overturned man, prematurely gnarled, with hairless legs, and a soft belly showing under his shirt, and a red, prickly chin. His hat has fallen to the side, and we see his bald forehead, inscribed with trophies of the sun. Then his hand reaches down to his shin.

"Christ's sake, Slim! Can't you watch where you're going?" says Smokey.

"Dad, are you all right?"

He grunts. He's breathing heavily. Dyan and I help him to his feet. There is a large wet spot on the front of his pants. I look at it and Dyan looks at it. Neither of us says anything. We go slowly up the boardwalk toward the house.

Smokey changes Dad, and then we all sit at the high counter in the kitchen, eating salad and cottage cheese and Norwegian crackers. By Dad's plate there is a tin of sardines. Dad eats greedily, not saying a word.

"You can see your father's much worse," says Smokey. "It's not a pretty picture, is it?"

My father does not look up when she speaks. This is something about Smokey I noticed even before they got married, which was during my first year of medical school, only six months after my mother died: she talks about people as though they're not there.

"But he's fine. Aren't you, Slim. *Slim?*"

My father looks up. He nods.

"He couldn't hurt himself if he tried. Could you, Slim?"

He nods.

Smokey begins cleaning up, refusing all help. Out on the beach, beyond the dune, I can see hundreds of bare gleaming bodies, and the rush of surf along the beach.

"Now, *we* have to take our nap," Smokey says. "You two go on out in the sun, enjoy the beautiful day."

The guest bedroom is under the main house, built into the side of the dune. It is mildewy, large enough only for a double bed with a plastic-covered mattress and two wire chairs with terrycloth pillows. The roof is made of corrugated green fiberglass nailed to the bottom of the sundeck. Light filters in, through sand and leaves trapped above.

"I wish you'd told me how bad he is," Dyan says. She has undressed to bra and panties, she is suffused by green-tinted light. "It's too depressing. Five minutes with them seems like a whole day. I was *suffocating* up there. I don't want to spend my whole vacation with a senile man."

"Great," I say. "What else?"

"What do you mean, what else?"

"Why are you in such a bad mood? What is it? You don't like gay people? You've been in a lousy mood since before we even got here."

"Why am *I* in a bad mood?" she says. "Oh boy, Alex, you're the one to talk about bad moods. You've been staring out like somebody died. Come *on*, Alex."

"I'm not in a bad mood," I say.

"Oh, you're not."

"No, I'm not. I know my father's got . . . I'm a doctor, I know he's going downhill. I know that, okay? And don't say I didn't tell you about it, because I did. I told you exactly what to expect. So if you want to go back to California, go right ahead."

"Thank you, doctor," she says. "Thanks a whole lot. I'm really glad you brought me here."

"Ditto," I say. "So do you want me to take you right down to the ferry? Or would you rather spend the whole week moping in here?"

"I'd rather mope."

"Suit yourself."

I undress. Dyan sits down on the mattress, bathing

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suit in her hand, hair falls over her shoulders, over her breasts. Dyan is a nurse in the group practice I've been working in for the past three years, in Mountain View, California: I'm an internist. Dyan's not *my* nurse, though, she works for Dr. Lew Frank, our pediatrician. Last May, Lew got hepatitis and had to take time off, and he asked me to cover for him: so I did, not that I know much of anything about kids. But I got to know Dyan. Before that I'd seen her as being pretty but kind of flaky, like a lot of nurses are—but she was so good with the kids that I fell for her. Sometimes I think I love her.

I hop into my bathing suit, and pull the drawstring tight, and tie it.

On the other hand, maybe I just brought her here to work.

"Look," I say. I'm shaking. "I've never seen him like this either. He's really deteriorated. Pissing on himself, for instance. He hasn't . . ."

"Oh," says Dyan. "Oh Alex, it *is* nice here . . . I'm sure we'll have a good time, really, we will." She stands, and hugs me, and then I really am sure I love her, and she steps into her bathing suit and tucks herself in, and sweeps her hair off her shoulders and ties it back and I pick up the two stiff, sun-dried towels that Smokey gave us, and Dyan takes the lotions and magazines and the bag of oranges we smuggled from California.

We go up.

The house is a large plywood box with a slanted roof and a small glass room on one end, Smokey's sculpture studio. It's not the kind of house my father would have built; Smokey has owned it for over twenty years, since before the Grove was all gay, and when they got married they had all kinds of plans for it: redo the windows, put on a second floor with columns and pediments and all that—a post-modernistic beach house. Dad drew up the plans, in fact, but they never even got started.

There's no sign of life. The sunbleached deck, hot underfoot, gives beneath our weight. Boards have rotted out in places, which are marked by overturned buckets and scraps of plywood. Inside, the house is dark, absolutely deserted.

The boardwalk to the beach, even hotter, is missing half a dozen boards. We step over the gaps, and test the more doubtful boards for strength before putting our weight down. The sand is ten feet below us: how does Dad navigate this stretch?

We walk through the beach grass, over the tops of nearly-submerged snow fences, to the dry sand of the public beach. People are lying very still here, baking in the windless afternoon. We descend a shelf of sand, really a small cliff, to get to the water. Above, the beach is flat and dry, down here it is wet, precipitously sloped, scattered with the gleaming carcasses of thousands of small jellyfish.

We head for The Pines.

"Does he talk at all?" says Dyan.

"Not much," I say. "Sometimes you can get him going and he'll talk about growing up in Brooklyn. Or about architecture. Mention Frank Lloyd Wright and he gets apoplectic, just like he always did."

"How about singing?" Dyan says.

"Singing?"

"Yes," Dyan says. "My grandmother *loved* to sing, way after she lost all power of speech. She only croaked when she tried to talk, but she still had a very beautiful, very clear singing voice. You could sit there forever, listening to her sing."

"My father never sang," I say.

We walk, arms around one another. I look at all the bodies we pass, male and female: limbs, organs, muscles. I wonder which ones have AIDS. I used to fantasize a lot about Dyan, especially before we went out; but now that I have her, I really don't. I think about Carrie, our receptionist, instead. I wonder why that is: I'm sure there's a reason, there's got to be.

"Smokey is weird about the Alzheimer's," I say. "She takes him to clinics all over. All kinds of quacks. Vaccines. Vitamin E. Lecithin. Choline. Amphetamines. She can't believe she's married to a guy who's in perfect health except his brain stopped working."

"Does he like it out here?" Dyan says.

I stop suddenly, and look her in the eye.

"He loves the Island," I say. "It's bizarre. He'd always make jokes about the boys: 'Look what the boys are wearing this year. Look what the boys are doing on the beach this year.' But he and Smokey really love it here. They have lots of friends."

We are almost at The Pines. Everyone is naked here. Dyan takes down the top of her bathing suit, rolling it down around her waist: the white foam cups of the suit bulge out above her belly. Her bare pale breasts waggle in the sunlight.

"Now," I say. "Now it's just one small disaster after another."

I stop and pull off my bathing suit, hopping on the wet sand, almost losing my balance. Dyan, oblivious, keeps walking. I stand naked, watching her bare, tanned back move away. Then, realizing I'm not there, she turns around, giggling, and hurries back, arms drawn up, at a half-skip, half-run.

"Look at you," she says.

I spread the towels on the warm sand above the little cliff.

"I'm sure this is their last summer here," I say.

We lie down side by side. I can hardly keep my hands off her.

I think I'm expecting some new disaster by the time we get back to the house, but Smokey and Slim are just sitting quietly inside at the card table with two men. They're playing bridge. One of the men is wearing a black leather vest with chains across his belly.

"Only thirty-four," he is saying. "And he's almost completely blind."

"Oh, hello," says Smokey, too enthusiastic. "How *was* your swim? Dyan, doesn't this beat California any day? Meet Todd and Baron, our bridge partners. Alex and Dyan. Alex is a general practitioner in California."

"I'm an *internist*," I say.

"And Dyan is his nurse."

"She's not my nurse," I say. "She works for another doctor."

"Of course," says Smokey. "I'm so sorry."

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"Hello, darlings," says Todd, the man in the vest. "A friend of ours is dying."

I shake Todd and Baron's hands. I think we've met before, but I'm not sure: I've been introduced to so many of the Grove people—middle-aged, gentle-looking men.

Dad suddenly stands up from his wicker chair, and stumbles away from the table.

"*Slim*," says Smokey. "Sit down!"

"Dad, you live here," I say.

Dad looks at me—directly, fixedly, for the first time all day. He is a big man, six foot three, two hundred and thirty pounds: if he wanted to make a break for it, it would not be easy to hold him back. He settles back in the wicker chair, breathing oddly.

"Does he have a cold?"

"No," says Smokey. "He just started breathing that way one day. *Slim!* Stay where you are! *Please!* "

Dad stands.

Todd takes Dad's hand and leads him over to the couch.

Smokey's face flushes and she begins crying.

"I can't tolerate that man anymore," she says. "Day in and day out, I have to sit and watch him get worse! He messes up the bed! He walks around in the middle of the night!"

"Not so loud! He has feelings too!"

"You think he understands?"

"I think you shouldn't talk about him as if he's not there."

"What right do you have to tell me what to do?" Smokey is in a rage. "Where are you when we need you? Where are you? Just tell me that. Where are you?"

"I . . . I'm three thousand miles away."

"So? So what?"

I sit down on the couch, head in my hands. In a few minutes Dyan's arms come around me, she's close at my side.

"You're right. You're one hundred percent right."

Then we all hug each other, except Dad, who stands, puzzled, between the TV and the sliding door.

Later, after Todd and Baron leave and we've more or less made up, we all sit out on the deck, drinking. The steaks are on the charcoal grill over on the bay side of the house, and Dyan and I drink our Bloody Mary's and Smokey has rye and ginger and Dad has a bottle of seltzer with a blue label marked 'Salt-free.'

Across the dunes, on the beach, people are rolling up their futons and towels and pulling bright flowing robes over their sunburnt bodies.

I slap a mosquito.

"Awful, aren't they?" Smokey says. "We're trying to get the county to spray. Baron says the county is homophobic. He says there's a conspiracy. He says that's why they won't spray here."

Dad shifts abruptly in his chair.

"That's bull," he says suddenly.

"What is it, doll?" Smokey says.

"He said it was bull."

"Maybe it is. Maybe so. Baron is a bit of a paranoiac." Smokey lights a cigarette with a gold tip and turquoise paper. She says confidingly, "You never do know just how much Slim's following the conversation."

"More than we might think," says Dyan.

I put my hand on her thigh. Once I went on a construction site with Dad in New Jersey—I don't know why I think of that now, but I remember how proud I was that I got to carry one of the sheafs of blueprints. And then I tripped over a board and hit the back of my head on the ground, and I woke up to see Dad over me, bent down, not to me but to save his drawings from the mud.

Or is that only how I choose to remember myself: ignored, helpless, unfathered?

Smoke drifts over the low pines, down among the beach plum bushes, where deer often hide.

It's getting dark over the Grove, the sky becoming pale except around a bright horizon of clouds, and the beach trembles under the waves. At the house next door, on the North side, men stand on the front deck wearing long bright-colored gowns and outrageous blonde and redheaded wigs. From downtown come the sounds of a bass guitar. Groups of men walk down the boardwalk, toward town. A few fireworks are already exploding.

"We have to get ready soon," says Smokey. "Tonight's the costume ball. We weren't going to go—I thought it was just too much. But Baron insists. It's a benefit."

Dad struggles out of his chair.

"Time to leave," he says.

"Dad," I say. I reach for his arm, and gently lower him back down in his chair.

Dyan goes to check the steaks; I join her, platter in hand. We stand together, looking over the town. We can see the black glint of bay beyond the town.

We bring the steaks inside.

"Sit down, both of you. How do you all like your meat?" says Smokey. She carves, giving me and Dyan rare, herself medium. For Dad she sets out two slices of bread and a tin of sardines.

"Sardines again?" I say.

"Slim doesn't eat red meat," Smokey says. "He's on a special diet to improve his memory. It's a high oil diet. I can already see some effects."

Dad mumbles something.

"What's that?" I say.

"The fella next door died," he says.

"Oh, that's true," says Smokey. "You knew Jerry, the banker, he lived down that way?" She points South.

"I don't know."

"Well, *he* remembers Jerry," says Smokey. "Jerry died, and his mother was out here trying to sell the house. Lotsa luck! Nobody's buying this summer. Slim! No steak!"

The house on the South side, I can see through the kitchen window, *is* dark.

"They couldn't rent it either," Dad says unexpectedly.

Smokey looks triumphant.

While they get dressed, Dyan and I clean up. The doorbell rings: it is Baron and Todd. Baron is in blackface and an Afro wig and a tight purple dress, and Todd, standing

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behind him, also in blackface, wears a sequined green dress, which is tight across his belly.

"Hello!" says Todd. "We're two-thirds of the Pointer Sisters. Are the old folks ready?"

"Not yet." I invite them in. Dyan looks stunned, standing over by the sink.

"What are you two wearing?" Todd says.

"Oh, we're not going."

"You *have* to go."

"You can go as a straight couple," says Baron. "Dyan will be the only woman there not wearing falsies. Smokey! Smokey!"

"Coming!"

"They have a terrific costume," says Todd. "They're always Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers."

Smokey appears first: she is wearing a tuxedo and a top hat, and carries a cane. And Dad is behind her, hobbling on high, ungainly heels, wearing one of Smokey's old evening gowns, with rouge and lipstick smeared brightly over his face.

"Wait a minute," I say. "You're not going like that! Smokey, how the hell can you do this?"

"Do what?"

Everyone is looking at me. Dad sinks down on the couch, breathing in his funny way.

"What do you mean, *do what?* Humiliate my father like this, that's what. I don't believe you, Smokey. This is really . . ."

Smokey breaks into tears.

"Oh for Christ's sake!"

"Alex," says Baron.

"What?"

"It's a costume party," he says. "*Everyone's* in drag. Slim always goes as Ginger Rogers, you know that."

"Everyone expects him as Ginger," says Todd.

"This is too much," I say.

"Come on," says Dyan. "It's okay, Alex. It's what they want to do."

"Forget it," I say.

The six of us walk slowly down the ocean walk, the men unsteady on their high heels, Smokey striding ahead. Dyan and I walk slowly, gradually falling behind. Several groups of men hurry past us: witches, nuns, princesses, film starlets, half a dozen Bette Midlers.

"Don't be so judgmental," says Dyan. "It's what they want to do. They should be able to do what they want to do."

"I just wish Smokey had some taste."

"What difference does it make what she does? She's got to have some hope."

"Why? What hope is there?"

"How could she spend any time with him if she didn't?"

"She's supposed to love him."

"I think she does."

We pass a construction site, several rows of thick timbers driven into the sand, and a motel and the blackened trash-ridden sands where one of the discos burned down a few summers ago. We enter the new motel complex.

The place is brilliant with costumes and smoke and noise. A dozen people come up to Smokey and Dad and kiss them hello, and escort them inside a large hall, which has a banner reading: AIDS BENEFIT CHERRY GROVE strung across a stage. We stand to the side, and when the band starts playing, Dyan pulls me outside.

"Let's go back," she says.

We're next to a bright turquoise swimming pool, which sends clouds of steam tumbling up into the darkness. Fireworks are exploding right above us. A half-dozen men in silver and red sequins suddenly run off the dance floor and jump into the pool.

"Todd and Baron will get them home," Dyan says.

We walk away. An amplified voice rises above the music, saying something about an urgent crisis, the need to raise thousands of dollars. The air is warm, and smells of the tide and pine trees. It is dark, and we walk slowly.

We turn a corner, and Dyan abruptly stops. She is looking into an uncurtained window. There are two men embracing.

"Look at that," she says.

"Come on. We don't belong here."

I have to pull her away.

At the house we take a blanket and pillows out of the humid downstairs room and bring them out on the deck and lie down next to each other. We touch each other. We can hear music and the crackle of fireworks, and every so often the sky lights up with their glow. I can't stop seeing the two men.

Later we go down to the outdoor shower, under the deck, and get in, turning the water as hot as it gets; and there, surrounded by old green corrugated fiberglass, the wet old boards of the deck overhead, we have sex again, shivering, in defiance—or is it in celebration?—of the spirit of the Grove.

Afterward, we lie in bed, reading cracked-spined old paperback mysteries. I fade off, I reawaken.

Dyan is still reading beside me.

"What time is it?"

"Around two."

"Are they back yet?"

"No."

I sit up. "Where the hell are they? I wonder if he fell off the damn boardwalk again. This is no place for old people."

"Do you think we should go look?"

"I don't know. I don't know."

Then we hear them coming up the boardwalk: Dad's heavy shuffling step, Smokey's voice, Todd's "Goodnight, darlings!", Smokey wrestling with the door.

And later, much later, heavy footsteps wandering across the living room floor.

"This is your house, Slim. You live here!"

A long argument ensues.

Morning is iridescent, liquid, removed from time, the wash of ocean muffled by fog which has not yet decided, if fog can decide, whether to burn dry or to lay itself thicker across the town. I wake, bladder so full my kidneys ache. I stumble across the lower deck to the bathroom. Then I go upstairs.

The windows on the ocean side are greasy with salt,

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and you can hardly see out. I open one of the small windows. I fill the heavy old teapot with water and turn on the electric range.

I walk out the beach-side door to the deck.

Along the dunes, dozens of bodies lie motionless, in clumps of two or three, under blankets and sleeping bags and entirely uncovered, their limbs splayed in odd positions. They are probably all dead, I think, victims of a plague, washed in bloated by the tide.

I walk around to the far end of the house: there, lying in one of the faded beach chairs, with red makeup still smeared across his face, is Dad. He is wearing a baggy old pair of bathing trunks. At first I think he's asleep, but then I see that his eyes are only half-shut, and that he is watching me.

"Morning, Dad."

His eyes open fully.

"How was the party? You guys came in really late last night."

He grunts.

"It was a good party?"

"Good," he says.

The teapot is whistling. I go back in through the beach door.

Smokey is in the kitchen, in her bathrobe and fluffy green slippers. She looks dazed, as though she just got out of bed.

"What's going on out there?"

"Trying to talk to Dad. Want some coffee?"

"*Sure.* Where's your sweetheart?"

"Oh, she's downstairs, sleeping."

"What does Slim have to say this morning?"

"Not much. I thought he was sleeping, but he's awake. Just sitting there."

"He does that. Gets up early, goes out there to sit. Got to keep an eye on him, though, he's liable to wander off."

"How was the party?"

"Wonderful. Lots of fun. He was dancing and singing. His friends were there. Of course they're heartbroken about the change. You know, how much worse he is."

I spoon coffee into cups, and pour from the old kettle.

"Milk?"

"Just a touch."

We sit at the breakfast counter, looking out the window at the seagrass, the dune, the hazy, distant-seeming beach.

"You should know this," says Smokey. "What I'm about to tell you. You're his son."

"Of course."

"Do you know how much sleep I've been getting? Do you know . . ." And she goes off again, telling me how she's really had it. Wandering at night, messes in the bed. All that. She's fed up to here. It has to end.

I sit back. I don't want to hear this. Okay, it is my own father who is being talked about, it is my problem as much as hers, I agree; but I'm tired of this, tired of being the good son, tired of Smokey's complaints.

"So!" Smokey suddenly gets cheerful. "What are you two young ones going to do today?"

"I think we'll just lie on the beach," I say. "You know, we can take Dad with us, if you want some time by yourself."

"Oh no. Where would I go? What would I do by myself?"

"Just relax. Be alone."

"That's worse," she says.

The screen door opens, and Dyan, radiantly fresh, sunburnt, her hair wet, comes in.

"Good morning," says Smokey.

"Morning," Dyan says. She kisses me, and sits beside me at the counter.

"Coffee?"

"Please," she says.

We drink coffee, chatting about California.

"Where's your Dad?" Dyan says.

"He's outside, resting on the deck. Why?"

"Oh, I thought I saw him on the boardwalk. But I guess it must have been someone else."

"Where?"

"Down on the ocean side, on the boardwalk."

"Oh God," I say. I feel drugged; I know what is happening, and it is like those nights when the answering service calls, and says, doctor, sorry to wake you, but . . . and it is some patient who is getting worse, failing, and there's nothing you can do, the time for appropriate action having passed. And so it is that I am not surprised when, rushing to the sliding door, we look out across the wooden deck to the empty chair, and that we all are suddenly in a panic.

I go out around to the ocean side, and climb up the top of the dune, to look across the grass and snowfences and the bodies which have not changed position, and the sand and the water, and Dyan and Smokey join me, looking down the hazy beach, on which no one, nothing, seems to be moving, not even the water itself—I look at the surface of the water, searching for his bald head, his paddling arms. But I don't see him. I look at the bodies lying on the sand, huddled in sleeping bags, in blankets—the day people, Dad contemptuously calls them, the disco boys, who come over for the evening and miss the last boat back and don't have the money for a motel room, and there it is that I see him, in his orange bathing suit, sitting hunched over, facing the water.

"There he is," I say.

"Where?" says Smokey.

"See, down there, past those branches stuck in the sand, near those people."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure. Look at him. That's him. Can't you tell?"

"I guess. I don't know," says Smokey. "Sure, you're right, it *is* Slim. Thank God, I thought he'd drowned or broken his neck."

"I'm sorry," says Dyan. "I knew it was him when I saw him walking, and I knew I should have stopped him, I don't know why I didn't. I feel awful."

"It doesn't matter," I say.

"It does matter. He could've drowned. He could be dead by now."

"Okay, it does matter," I say. And I leave them behind and go down over the rickety boardwalk, down to the public beach to rescue my father. □

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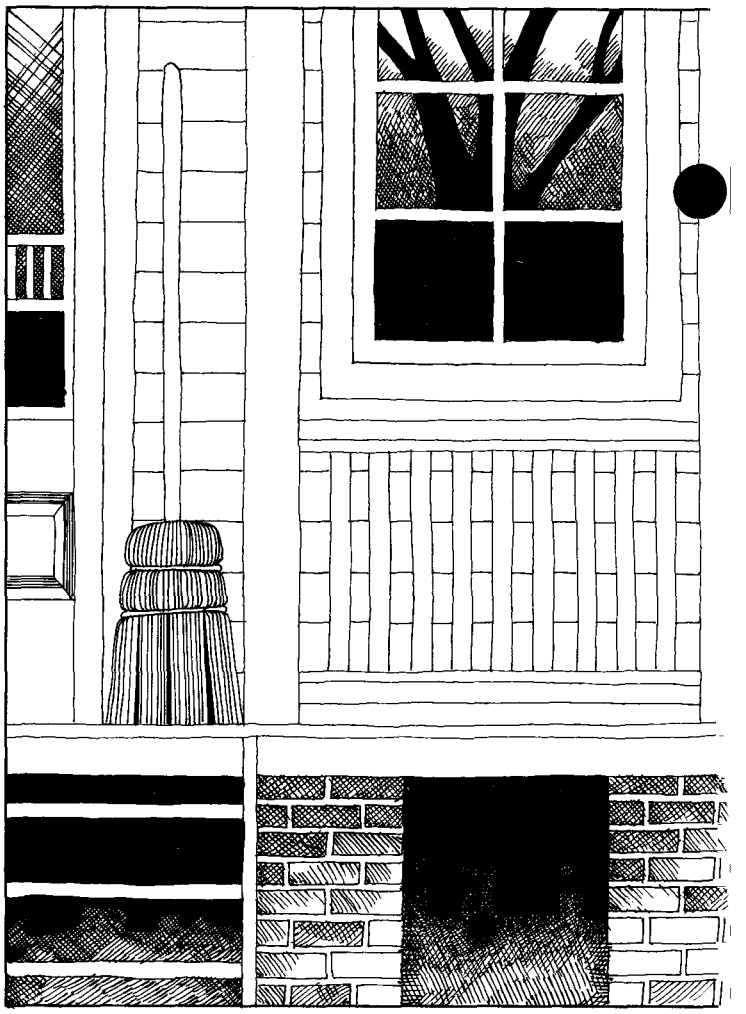
A VISIT TO AUNT IVY'S

WALTER SANDERS



Aunt Ivy called at about five-thirty Thursday afternoon and in one of her methodically detailed and matter-of-fact explanations told me that she and Uncle Mort would not be driving over to South Bend for Grandma's birthday party and that I should bring her to Valparaiso because Uncle Mort had died at about one-thirty that afternoon, the doctor had said that, and she would give me more details when Grandma and I got there but I shouldn't explain too much to Grandma because she was so looking forward to her ninety-fourth birthday celebration. I said we would leave in the morning and probably be there by nine-thirty and that we would come right to her house on Jefferson if that's what she wanted.

She said that would be fine, and then went into detail about the last half day of Uncle Mort's life. She had the details all worked out so well already that I thought she might be reading a script, and whereas I expected, wanted some tragic note, Aunt Ivy, as usual, merely recounted grocery-list fashion the minute by minute activities of Uncle Morton until she found him sitting back in the kitchen chair, his lunch, which she had prepared for him before she had gone downtown for banking and shopping, only partially eaten. I had wanted to cry when Aunt Ivy first called and broke the news, although we knew that Uncle Mort didn't have much time, but Aunt Ivy's account left no room for tears over the phone.

"We got up at seven-thirty this morning, Clara," Aunt Ivy said. "That was a little later than usual because as you know your Uncle Mort liked to catch the first segment of the 'Today' Show. He always said it started his day off right knowing what was going on in the world and nation. And then at breakfast we always talked about the weather forecast for the next few days. Anyway, this morning Mort watched the second half hour of the news and seemed satisfied that he hadn't missed anything really important by sleeping that extra half hour, at least he didn't complain at breakfast which we began eating at ten minutes after eight. He had his usual two cups of black coffee and ate a really good breakfast of corn flakes and half an English muffin with apple butter and we had some blueberries on the cornflakes. I had thawed them yesterday. They were some Joe and Esther brought us last summer from New Jersey. They brought quarts and quarts of fresh-picked berries with them and we just finished the last half-pint I had in the freezer this morning. Mort remarked about the good fresh taste of those berries and really enjoyed his breakfast this morning. He shaved and dressed and by nine o'clock we were sitting on the sun porch re-reading last night's paper and this morning's *Tribune* and Mort was finishing his second cup of coffee. You there, Clara?"

"Yes, Aunt Ivy, I'm really sorry about Uncle Mort, I'll

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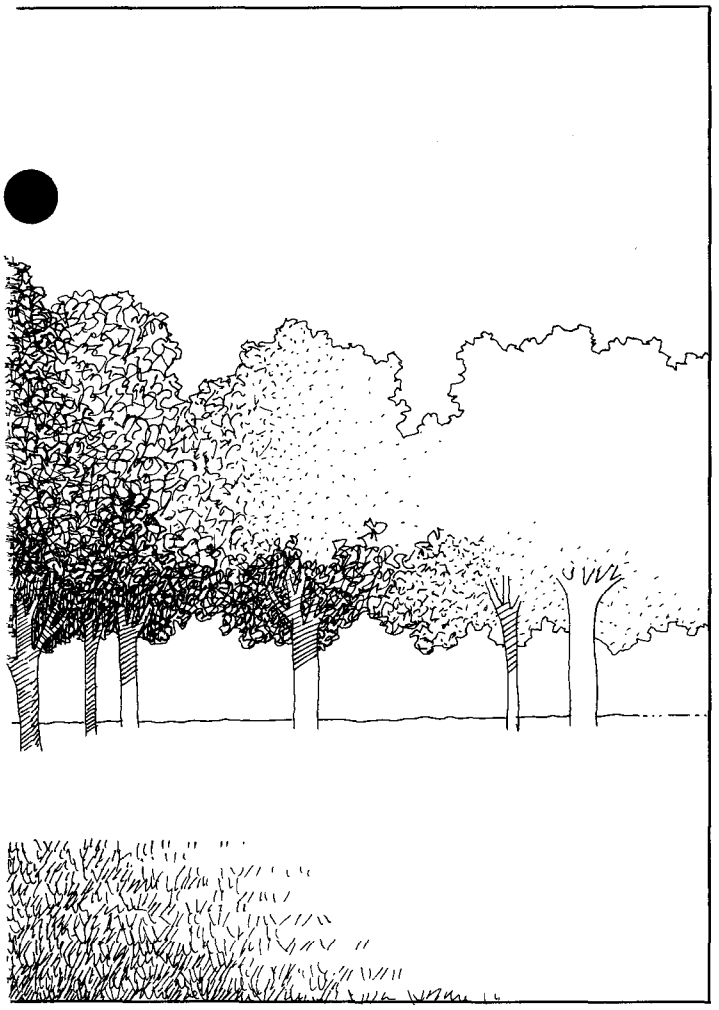

get Grandma's things packed tonight and we'll be there first thing in the morning."

"Then Mort knew that I would be gone for a few hours and I explained that when he was ready for lunch he should go to the refrigerator and there were three pieces of chicken and some cold potato salad all arranged on a plate and that he was to eat that for lunch and drink some milk and I would be back by three or three-thirty at the latest. When I got back home, I was early, for it was only two-thirty, there was your Uncle Mort sitting at the kitchen table, his head thrown back over the back of the chair and his arms hanging straight down. He hadn't fallen on the floor or leaned toward the side of the chair or anything. And he had done just what I had told him to do. There in front of him was a plate with the remains of two drumsticks and an uneaten wing and most of the potato salad eaten. And half a glass of milk was gone. He had eaten most of a good lunch and then had leaned back and died right there at the kitchen table. I shook him a little but I could tell he wasn't breathing and his eyes were open, but I knew he was dead and then I called the emergency unit at the hospital and they were here in ten minutes and the doctor at the hospital said that Mort had died quickly and that the emergency unit couldn't have done anything even if they had been there when he leaned back in his chair to die. Now, Clara, you don't tell Grandma any of the details. Just tell her there's been a change in plans about celebrating her birthday and I'll explain the details to her when you get here tomorrow. You come right to the house. I have to call your mother in Chicago, but I called you first because I didn't want you and the children to be waiting for us tomorrow and then have to change your plans. Now you go over to the nursing home and get Grandma ready like a good girl. I've got to make more calls."

"Thanks Aunt Ivy," I said.

Bill, my husband, got back from the University where he teaches fifteen minutes later and just looked at me as I sat in the kitchen at the table, the preparations for our dinner halted half way through. The children, Mike and Pat, were watching TV. I hadn't told them yet about Uncle Mort. I hadn't cried yet. I couldn't get over the conversation with Aunt Ivy although I had heard many similar ones before in which she equally adeptly masked or hid from the tragedy she reported by getting all involved and thus involving her listeners in the circumstances that surrounded an event instead of the event itself. I think that's what she did.

"Uncle Mort died this afternoon. Aunt Ivy just called. We're to take Grandma there tomorrow. I've got to go to Bethany and get Grandma's things packed."

"I'm sorry, Clara. Is Ivy O.K.?"

"I think so. I don't know. All she told me was what Mort had for breakfast and what he was eating for lunch when he died while she was downtown shopping and things."

"I'll help you, Clara. I'll finish dinner. Have you told Mike and Pat?"

"No. I don't think so. I think I've just been sitting here, stunned, sort of, since Ivy's incredible call."

"We'll tell the kids after supper. I'll go with you to Bethany and we can visit with your grandmother and see if we can get her ready. You take her and the children to Ivy's tomorrow and I'll drive over in the afternoon after classes. When's the funeral?"

"I don't know. We didn't talk about that."

Grandma had been making plans for her ninety-fourth birthday for months although she thought she was going to be ninety-five and sometimes she said, with glee, "I might even be going to be ninety-six, or ninety-seven, and if you'd count the years again, I bet you'd find out there have been maybe ninety-nine. I know I won't be a hundred, that's for sure."

I called mother while Bill finished getting dinner ready. Mother and I cried more than we talked. Ivy had already given mother all the details and they checked with what Aunt Ivy had told me earlier. Ivy was mother's older sister and had always had a way of managing the family and the family news. She didn't meddle or anything, but she always explained the way things were. She was sort of the family historian, I guess, and when dad died six years ago Ivy had been unyielding in extracting all the details about his last days and weeks and at the funeral gave her meticulous account to all the relatives. Had Mort not been sitting there in the funeral home, I think some of the visitors might not have believed that Ivy was the bereaved, for she greeted everyone, led them

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to the coffin, showed them where their flowers were, and gave them a dry-eyed account of dad's last days in such detail that her listeners were as caught up in detail as she was herself. Mom and I sat together on the sidelines, thankful, I think, that Ivy had enabled us to savor our grief and feel that peculiar strong bond between mother and daughter again and again.

Grandma McCaw was glad to see us, and the children's slightly moist eyes went unseen by her that evening. She was pleased that we were going to Ivy's because, as she said, when there was a party at Mort and Ivy's everything was done right. I just told Grandma that there was a change in plans and that Ivy and Maureen, my mother, would be in Valparaiso and that we were going to drive over there and spend the weekend and that I would be back in the morning for her. I packed whatever clothes she thought she wanted, held her for a long moment, cried a little, kissed her goodnight and left her, unable to sleep, I believe, because of the delight the proposed trip to Ivy's gave her. Bill and I explained to the nursing home administrator what had happened, and we were assured that Grandma would be ready by eight the next morning.

Grandma was a good car rider. She liked to sit in the front seat and remark about the smooth roads and nice green hills and pretty farms that she only half saw. She didn't fuss much about wearing the seat belt. But I had never been able to successfully explain to her what they were for. Somehow she had gotten the idea that they made the trip last longer. And whether we had driven one mile or forty or a hundred, she would say, "That was a nice long trip, dear." Grandma also had the idea, once I got her buckled in, that she had to lean into the belt to make it work or to make the trip in the car last longer, and as she leaned forward, her lower lip would droop and her eyes would stare at the dashboard until I explained again and again that everything would be fine if she just leaned back in the seat and relaxed. Sometimes I had to stop the car and get out and go around to the passenger side of the car and take her gently by the shoulders and show her how to lean back while in harness. After that she rode along comfortably although she sometimes tried to pull her purse under the strap across her chest and when that didn't work, she would look at me and chew on her gums in some mild kind of frustration. That morning, shortly after eight, I had managed to convince her that her purse would be perfectly safe on the floor next to her seat alongside my purse.

The drive to Ivy's took about an hour and a half, so we arrived shortly after nine-thirty. Mother would be there by noon. I was to drive to Chesterton to pick her up at the train stop and bring her the eight miles back to Ivy's.

Aunt Ivy was sweeping the already clean front porch when we pulled up. Mike and Pat had been solemn all the way over, slightly happy about missing a day of school, and mindful of their grandfather's funeral when they were five and the terrible effect it had had on me. So they stood there, unpacking the suitcases from the trunk as Ivy waved with her broom from the front porch steps before setting forth at a gallop to help get Grandma into the house.

Ivy held her broom under one arm and hugged and kissed her mother who stood there on the sidewalk nodding her head rapidly and patting Ivy on the shoulder. I think Ivy wiped a tear from her eye as she said, "Mom, I'm so glad to see you. Come right along in. And Clara, you have the boys take the bags up to the two rooms you usually use. They know the way. I have some fresh coffee brewed and some of Mother's favorite bran muffins that I just baked this morning. We'll visit a spell until you have to drive up to Chesterton to pick up Maureen. She's coming in on the eleven-fifty. I could go, but I expect that I'll be needed here, and I want to explain some things to Grandma."

Grandma enjoyed her second breakfast and thought that eating on the sun porch was just like eating outdoors and that it was a special treat because the sun was out and we had had such a nice long drive to Ivy's and she thought everything looked so nice and tidy the way Ivy always kept things and at the nursing home she didn't get to eat all the butter that she wanted but she had had plenty this morning and that someone who was going to be ninety-five or ninety-seven deserved special treats like lots of butter just as she had always had on the farm when she was a child when her mother and she made fresh butter and buttermilk and stored it in the cool stone milk house.

Ivy smiled at Grandma and me and busied herself with picking up the remains of the morning snack, and although I offered to help wash the dishes so Ivy could visit with Grandma, Ivy would have none of it, she said, and I should take Grandma into the living room where she could watch a TV program if she liked. I helped carry the dishes into the kitchen anyway.

"You go into the living room too, child," Ivy said. "I'll be along in just two shakes," she added.

Grandma liked to laugh when the recorded laughter of a television program laughed and she said that she enjoyed TV shows more than those movies because they were more fun. I settled Grandma into a chair and had her lean against the back so she wouldn't fall to one side.

Ivy came in and began talking about who was going to be there tomorrow. And I said Bill would drive over after classes and would be here at the latest by five-thirty. Grandma listened and listened as though the list of people who would be arriving was the most select list of guests she could ever imagine coming to her birthday party. Ivy would give a name and Grandma would repeat the name and nod her head and say, "Yes, I always liked Pearl. It will be fine for her to come." I wanted to tell Grandma that Uncle Morton had died, that this was his funeral. Ivy wasn't going to tell. I knew that Mother would just cry and sit in another room and weep and think again about her long six years of loneliness without Dad. I didn't know what it was. But in Ivy's house we never talked about realities.

Mother and I cried in one another's arms at the Chesterton depot. And I drove the eight miles back to town trying not to sob so that I could see the road. I managed to fill mom in about Grandma's confusion, and mom agreed that Ivy was to break the news to Grandma. Mother was sure that the visitation at the funeral parlor that night would straighten things out.

Grandma couldn't understand mother's emotion as

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they hugged one another and kissed. And when mother hugged her sister, Ivy, and bit her lip to keep back a flood of tears, Grandma shook her head and chewed her gum faster than I had ever seen her do.

Mother and I spent at least an hour that afternoon in the bedroom she was going to stay in, and we agreed that we would let Ivy have the say about how things were to be done. Mother was a better cook than Ivy, and even Ivy admitted that, so Mother and I prepared dinner while Ivy and Grandma talked about whatever Ivy wanted to, and Mike and Pat explained to both of them their science project. They were both working on carbon-dating Indian artifacts for the Science Fair. Bill had helped their interest along and the boys were eager to explain the ins and outs of carbon-14. Their audience, when I left the room, was approving but understood little more than I did.

Grandma didn't even notice that Mort wasn't at the dinner table that night and all she said was what a good cook Ivy was and that the roast beef was done to a turn and that the food at Ivy's was so much better than at Bethany. And she said that if there had been a birthday cake she would have believed this was her birthday dinner, but she was sure today wasn't her birthday.

"No, Mother," Ivy said, "your birthday is tomorrow. We'll have the birthday cake then. You're going to be ninety-four."

"Ninety-four, is it?" Grandma said and chewed her gums slowly.

We all got in Bill's station wagon, Bill and I and Grandma in the front seat and Ivy and Mother and the boys in the back, and drove the five blocks to the funeral home. Ivy had let me clear the table but said that the dishes could be tended to when we got back.

Mort had many former colleagues and neighbors who visited that night, and Ivy was in full charge. She introduced each to Grandma and said that tomorrow she was going to observe her ninety-fourth birthday. Friend after friend greeted Grandma, told her how well she looked, remarked about what a ripe old age she had attained, showed concern for Ivy who led them over to the covered casket. Although Grandma had known many of Mort and Ivy's friends in the past, their identity now was dim, unremembered.

Grandma said, "The flowers are beautiful. So many flowers and they all smell so fresh."

What did she know? She smiled, shook hands, chewed on her gums, stared into space, blankly, I think, called the neighbor, James Friedrich, young Jim, took everyone's wishes kindly, ignored or didn't hear their condolences. Condolences were just not part of the plan. There was no reason for them.

After the burial, Saturday morning, Ivy must have invited fifty townspeople to her house. Neighbors brought in ham, roast beef, a turkey, a smorgasbord of salads and Ivy had ordered a chocolate cake from Clever Hans Bakery. It *was* beautiful, four rich, moist layers of chocolate meringue cake filled with a French vanilla cream, the sides encrusted with ground almonds and the top studded with dark chocolate curls. Grandma enjoyed the guests, became the center of attention as she opened gifts of nightgowns, a shawl, her favorite lavender water. She wanted a candle on the cake, and so Ivy found some birthday candles and lit them and Grandma with the help of Pat and Mike blew them out. She closed her eyes and blew and blew and the boys' wind did the trick. The house was filled with funeral arrangements. We all sang "Happy Birthday." Mother cried. I talked to her. Ivy seemed delighted that all went so well.

Bill and I talked for hours that night after we went to bed. I cried in his arms. He comforted me in his gentle, understanding way and said that if Grandma didn't know now she would never know. I thought I would always be confused about this day.

In the morning we went to church in the Valparaiso University Chapel and after that Ivy insisted that we all let her treat us to dinner at the Strongbow Turkey Inn. She had made reservations. There was no way out.

During dinner, friends of Ivy's greeted us, hugged her, expressed their sympathy, were introduced or reintroduced to the rest of us. And Ivy always mentioned that her mother had just observed her ninety-fourth birthday. Expressions changed from sorrow to amazement as eyes focused on my attractive grandmother who tried to smile at all the attention. Once while being introduced to a member of the English department at Valparaiso, the department Uncle Mort had taught in for forty years, Grandma said, "Too bad Mort couldn't make it today."

Pat and Mike looked at me with fright in their eyes. I thought Mother was going to cry.

Bill was going to drive the station wagon back to South Bend and the boys were going to ride along with him. They were sure that some of the fossils they had dug that last summer would extend the reach of their experiment and wanted to talk to their dad about their ideas. I was to take Grandma back to our house for a light supper and then we would return her to Bethany and visit awhile. Mother was going to stay with Ivy for a few days and then visit us the next weekend.

"No tears, Clara, no tears," said Aunt Ivy as I hugged her and said goodbye.

"I'll call tomorrow, Mother," I said as I released a hand of each of the sisters that I held fondly and stepped back to get into the car.

"Goodbye, Mother. Keep your seat belt on," Ivy and mom said as we drove away.

We took the longer way, Route 30, because of the traffic that would be on the toll road that Sunday afternoon, and I pointed out some of the sights to Grandma who seemed to be keeping time with her gums to the music of Vivaldi's "The Seasons," coming over the car radio from WFMT in Chicago. That station made driving almost bearable.

Then all of a sudden, we had about ten miles to drive before reaching South Bend, Grandma turned to me and said, "Child, Clara, where have we been?"

"We've been to Ivy's, Grandma."

"Ivy's, you say."

"Yes. Uncle Mort died. We've been to his funeral, and you've celebrated your birthday. You were ninety-four yesterday."

"Child," Grandma said, "You're as crazy as I am. You don't no more know where you've been than I do." □

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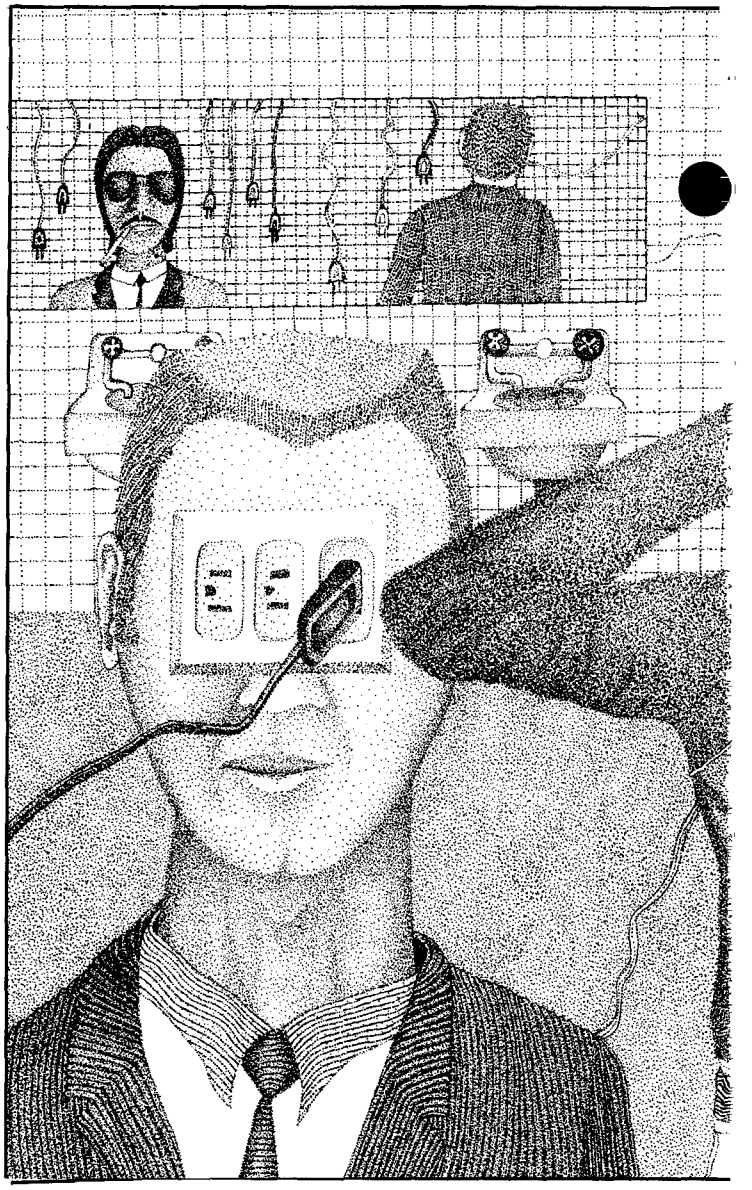
CITY OF BOYS

BETH NUGENT



My little sweetheart, she says, bringing her face close enough for me to see the fine net of lines that carves her skin into a weathered stone, You love me, don't you, little sweetheart, little lamb?

Whether or not she listens any more, I am not sure, but I always answer yes, yes I always say, yes, I love you.

She is my mother, my father, my sister, brother, cousin, lover; she is everything I ever thought any one person needed in the world. She is everything but a boy.

—Boys, she tells me. Boys will only break you.

I know this. I watch them on the street corners, huddled under their puddles of blue smoke. They are as nervous as insects, always some part of their bodies in useless agitated motion, a foot tapping, a jaw clenching, a finger drawing circles against a thigh, eyes in restless, programmed movement, from breasts to face to legs to breasts. They are never still, and they twitch and jump when I walk by, but still I want them. I want them in the back seats of their cars, I want them under the bridge where the river meets the rocks in a slick slide of stone, I want them in the back rows of theaters and under the bushes and benches in the park.

—Boys, she says, don't think about boys. Boys would only make you do things you don't know how to do and things you'd never want to do if you knew what they were. I know, she says, I know plenty about boys.

She is everything to me. She is not my mother, although I have allowed myself the luxury of sometimes believing myself her child. My mother is in Fairborn, Ohio, where she waits with my father for me to come home and marry a boy and become the woman into whom she still believes it is not too late for me to grow. Fairborn is a city full of boys and parking meters and the Air Force, but most of all it is a city full of my mother and in my mind she looms over it like a cloud of radioactive dust. If I return it will be to her. She is not why I left, she is not why I am here; she is just one thing I left, like all the things that trail behind us when we go from place to place, from birth to birth and from becoming to becoming. She is just another

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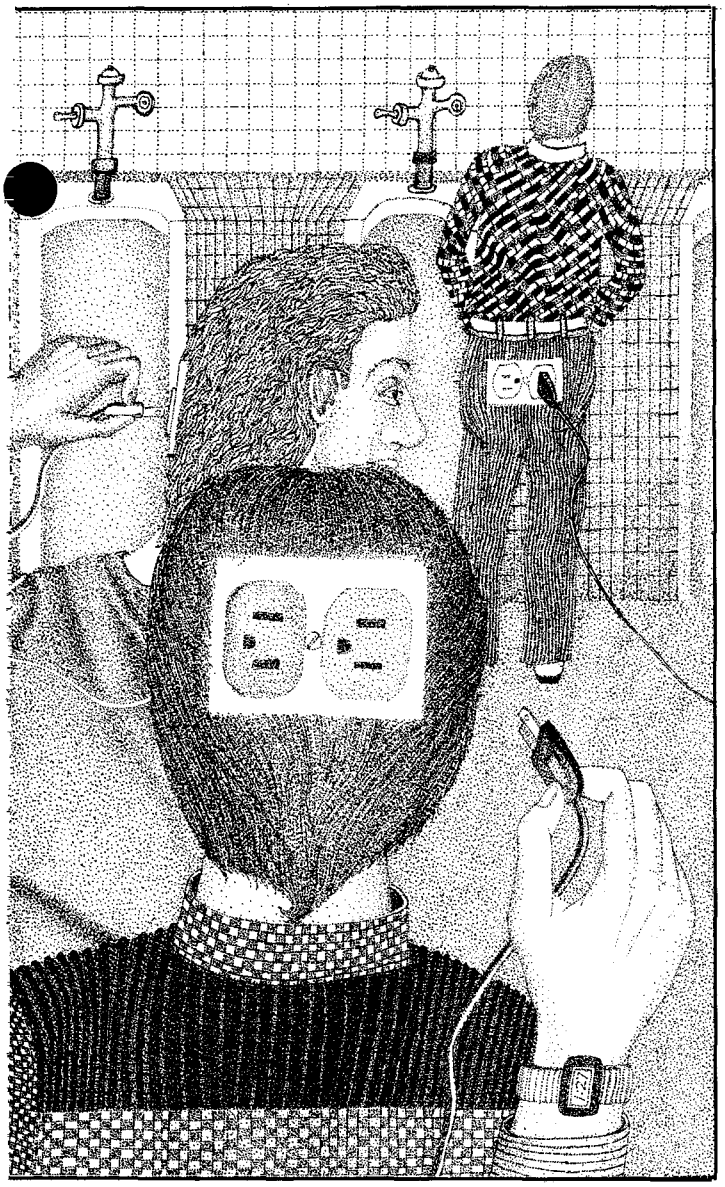

breadcrumb, just another mother in the long series of mothers that let you go to become the women you have to become. But you are always coming back to them.

Where I live now is also a city full of boys, and coming here I passed through hundreds of cities and they were all full of boys.

—Boys, she tells me, are uninteresting, and when they grow up, they become men and become even more uninteresting.

I know this too. I see how boys spend their days, either standing around or playing basketball or engaged in irritating persistent harangue, and I can draw my own conclusions as to what they talk about and as to the heights of which they are capable and I see what they do all day, but still I want them.

The one time I pretended she was a boy, she knew it because I closed my eyes and I never close my eyes, and I imagined it was a boy there doing that, soft tongue between my thighs, and when I came she slapped me hard.

—I'm not a boy, she said, just you remember that. You know who I am and just remember that I love you and no boy could ever love you like I do.

Probably she is right. What boy could love with her slipping concentration; probably no boy could ever achieve what she lets go with every day that comes between us, what she has lost in her long history of love.

What I do sometimes is slip out under her absent gaze. —Where are you going, what are you going to do, she says, and wallowing in the luxury of thinking myself a child, I answer Nowhere, nothing. In their pure undirected intoxicating meaninglessness, our conversations carry more significance than either of us is strong enough to bear, together or alone, and I drag it out into the streets today, a long weight trailing behind me, as I look for boys.

Today, I tell myself, is a perfect day for losing things, love and innocence, illusions and expectations; it is a day through which I will walk and walk until I find the perfect boy.

Where we live, on the upper west side, the streets are full of Puerto Rican men watching women. Carefully they examine each woman that walks by, carefully they hold her with their eyes, as if they are somehow responsible for her continued existence on the street. Not a woman goes by untouched by the long leash of their looks.

Oh, they say, Mira Mira sssssssssss. In their eyes are all the women they have watched walk by and cook and comb their black hair; all the women they have touched with their hands, and all the women they have known live in their eyes and gleam out from within the dark. Their eyes are made only to see women on the streets.

Where we live, on West 83rd and Amsterdam, there are roaches and rats, but nothing matters as long as we're together, we say valiantly, longingly. Nothing matters, I say, stomping a roach and nothing matters, she agrees, her eyes on a low-slung rat sidling by in the long hallway toward the little garbage room across from the door to our apartment. I told the super once that if he kept the garbage out on the street, perhaps the building would be less a home for vermin.—What's vermin, he wanted to know.—Vermin, I told him, is rats and roaches and huge black beetles scrabbling at the base of the toilet when you turn on the light at night. Vermin is all the noises at night, all the clicking and scratching and scurrying through the darkness.—No rats, he said, maybe a mouse or two, and maybe every now and then you'll see your roach eggs, but I keep this place clean. Together we watched as a big brown-shelled roach tried to creep past us on the wall. Neither of us moved to kill it, but when it stopped and waved its antennae, he brought his big fist down in a hard slam against the wall. He didn't look at the dead roach, but I could hardly take my eyes off it, perfectly flattened as though it had been steamrolled against the side of his palm.—Maybe a roach here and there, he said, flicking the roach onto the floor without looking at it, but I keep this place clean. Maybe if you had a man around the house, he said, trying to look past me into the apartment, you wouldn't have so much trouble with vermins.

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I pretended not to understand what he meant and backed into the room. Rent control is not going to last forever in New York, and when it goes and all the Puerto Ricans have had to move to the Bronx, we will have to find jobs or hit the streets, but as long as we're together, as long as we have each other.—We'll always have each other, won't we, she says, lighting a cigarette and checking to see how many are left in her pack.

—Yes, I always say, wondering if she's listening or just lost in a cigarette count. You'll always have me, I say. Unless, I think, unless you leave me, or unless I grow up to become the woman my mother still thinks is possible.

Today is a day full of boys. They are everywhere, and I watch each of them, boys on motorcycles, in cars, on bicycles, leaning against walls, walking, to see which of them in this city of boys is mine.

I am not so young and she is not so old, but rent control is not going to last forever, and someday I will be a woman. She wants, I tell myself, nothing more than me. Sometimes I think she must have been my mother, the way she loves me, but when I asked her if she was ever my mother, she touched my narrow breasts and said Would your mother do that, and ran her tongue over my nipple and said Or that. Would your mother know what you want, Sweetheart? I'm not your mother, she said, I stole you from a mattress downtown, just around the corner where all the winos lie around in piss and wine and call for help and nobody listens. I saved you from that, she says, but I remember too clearly the trip out here, in the middle of a car full of people full of drugs, most of them, and I remember how she found me standing just outside the porn theater on 98th and Broadway and she slipped me right from under the gaze of about four hundred curious Puerto Ricans.—Does your mother know where you are? she said. I laughed and said, My mother knows all she needs to know, and she said, Come home with me, I have somebody I want you to meet. When she brought me home, she said to a big man who lay on the couch watching television, Tito, this is Princess Grace, and Tito raised his heavy head from the end of the couch and said, She don't look like no princess to me.

I never thought much of Tito, and she never let him touch me, even though our apartment is only one room, and he was sick with wanting it from me. At night after they'd done it just about as many times as anyone could, she crept over to me on little cat feet and whispered into my ear, Sweetheart you are my only one. As Tito slugged and snored his way through the nights, we'd do it at least one more time than they had, and she would sigh and say, Little sweetheart, you're the one I wanted all the time, even through all those boys and girls that loved me it was always you that I was looking for, you that I always wanted.

This is the kind of talk that kills me, this is the kind of talk that won me, in addition to the fact that she took me in from the hard streets full of boys and taxicabs and cops and everywhere I looked the hard eyes of innocence turned.

What it felt like with her that first time was my mother come back and curled up inside me, giving birth, so that I came out of her at the exact same second that I moved closest into her center.

The long car pulls up to the sidewalk and I bend to see if it has boys in it. It is full of them, so I say,

—Hey, can I have a ride.

—Hey, they say, Hey, the lady wants a ride. Where to, they ask.

—Oh, I say, wherever.

I look to see where they are heading;—Uptown, I say and the door swings open and I slide in. The oldest boy is probably 16 and just got his driver's license and is driving his mother's car, a big Buick, or Chevrolet, or Monte Carlo, a mother's car. Each of the boys is different, but they are all exactly alike in the way that boys are, and right away I find the one I want. He's the one who does not look at me, and he's the oldest, only a couple of years younger than me, and it is his mother's car we are in.

—How about a party, they say, we know a good party uptown.

—Let's just see, I say, let's just ride uptown and see.

Sometimes I wake up to see her leaning on her thin knees against the wall that is stripped down to expose the rough brick beneath the plaster. I dream that she prays to keep me, but I am afraid that she prays for something else, a beginning or an end, or something I don't know about. She came to bed once and laid her face against my breast and I felt the imprint of the brick on the tender skin of her forehead.

She herself is not particularly religious, although the apartment is littered with the scraps of saints—holy relics of one sort or another; a strand of hair from the Christ child, a bit of fingernail from Paul, a shred of the virgin's robe. They are left over from Tito, who collected holy relics the way some people collect lucky pennies or matchbooks, as some kind of hedge against some inarticulated sense of disaster. They are just clutter here, though, in this small apartment where we live and I suggested to her once that we throw them out. She picked up a piece of dried weed from Gethsemane and said, I don't think they're ours to throw out. Tito found them and if we got rid of them, who knows what might happen to Tito. Maybe they work is what I mean, she said; I don't think it's spiritually economic to be a skeptic about absolutely everything.

When Tito left, his relics abandoned for some new hope, she was depressed for a day or two, but said that it was really the best for everybody, especially for the two of us, the single reality to which our lives have been refined. Tito said he was getting sick of watching two dykes moon over each other all the time, though I think he was just angry because she wouldn't let him touch me. I was all for it, I wanted him to touch me. That's what I came to this city for, to have someone like Tito touch me, someone to whom touching is all the reality of being, someone who doesn't do it in basements and think he has to marry you, someone who does it and doesn't think about the glory of love. But she wouldn't have it, she said if he ever touched me, she would send me back to the 98th Street porn

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theater and let the Puerto Ricans make refried beans out of me, and as for Tito, he could go back to Rosa, his wife in Queens, and go back to work lugging papers for the *Daily News* and ride the subway every day and go home and listen to Rosa talk on the telephone all night, instead of hanging out on street corners and playing cards with the men outside the schoolyard. Because, she said, because she was paying the rent, and as long as rent control lasted in New York she would continue to pay the rent and she could live quite happily and satisfactorily by herself until she found the right sort of roommate; one, she said, fingering the shiny satin of Tito's shirt, who paid the rent.

So Tito kept his distance and kept us both sick with his desire and when she finally stopped sleeping with him on the bed and joined me on the mattress on the floor, even Tito could see that it wasn't going to be long before he would have to shift himself to the floor. To save himself from that he said one day that he guessed he was something of a fifth wheel around the joint, huh, and he'd found a nice Puerto Rican family that needed a man around the house and he guessed he'd move in with them. I think he was just covering for himself, though, because one day when she was out buying cigarettes, he roused himself from the couch and away from the television and said to me, You know, she was married before, you know.

—I know that, I said, I know all about that. How she pays the rent is with alimony money that still comes in from her marriage, and I know all about that and Tito wasn't telling me anything that I didn't know, so I looked back at the magazine I was reading and waited for him to go back to the television.

He kept looking at me, so I got up to look out the window to see if I could see her coming back and if she had anything for me.

—What I'm trying to say, he said, What I'm trying to tell you, is that you're not the only one, not you. I was the only one once too, the one she wanted all those years; I was the one before you and you're just the one before someone else.

I could see her rounding the corner from 83rd and Broadway and could see that she had something in a bag, doughnuts or something, for me. I said nothing but looked out the window and counted her steps toward our building. She was reeling slightly, and leaning toward the wall, so I guessed that she must have had a few drinks in the bar where she always buys her cigarettes. When I could hear her key turning in the lock to the street door, I went to open our door for her and Tito grabbed me by the arm and said, Listen, you just listen. Nobody is ever the only one for nobody, don't kid yourself.

I pulled away and opened the door for her and she came in, cold skin and wet, and I put my face in her hair and breathed in the smell of gin and cigarettes and all the meaning of my life.

The next day Tito left, but he didn't go far, because I still see him hanging out on street corners. Now all the women he has known are in his eyes, but mostly there is her, and when he looks at me, I cannot bear to see her, lost in the dark there. Whenever I pass him, I always say

—Hey, Tiiiiiiito, Mira Mira, huh? and all his friends laugh, while Tito tries to look as though this is something he's planned himself, as though he has somehow elicited this remark from me.

One day I suppose Tito will use the key he forgot to leave behind to sneak in and cover me with his flagging desire, his fading regrets, and his disappointments, and she will move on, away from me; but rent control will not last forever in New York, and I cannot think ahead to the beginnings and the ends for which she prays.

The boys in the car lean against one another and leer and twitch like tortured insects and exchange glances that they think are far too subtle for me to understand, but I've come too far looking for too much to miss any of it. We drive too fast up Riverside, so that it's no time before the nice neighborhoods become slums full of women in windows and bright clothing slung over fire escapes, and salsa music laid over the thick city air like a layer of air all itself. Like the sound of crickets threading through the Ohio summer nights, it sets the terms for everything.

—So, one of them says to me, so where are you going, anyways.

—Well, I say, Well. I was thinking about going to the Bronx Botanical Gardens. The Bronx Botanical Gardens is no place I'd ever really want to go, but I feel that it's important to maintain, at least in their eyes, some illusion of destination. If I were a bit more sure of myself, I'd suggest that we take the ferry over to Staten Island and do it in the park there. Then I could think of her. When we went to Staten Island, it was cold and gray and windy; we got there and realized that there was nothing we wanted to see, that being in Staten Island was really not all that different from being in New York.—Or anywhere, she said, looking down a street into a corridor of rundown clothing stores and insurance offices. It was Sunday, so everything was closed up tight and no one was on the streets. Finally we found a coffee shop near the station, where we drank cokes and coffee and she smoked cigarettes while we waited for the boat to come in.

Lezzes, the counter man said to another man sitting at the counter eating a doughnut. What do you want to bet they're lezzes?

The man eating the doughnut turned and looked us over and said

—They're not so hot anyways, no big waste.

She smiled and held her hand to my face for a second; the smoke from the cigarette she held drifted past my eyes into my hair.

—What a moment, she said, to remember.

On the way back I watched the wind whip her face all out of any shape I knew, and when I caught the eyes of some boys on the ferry, she said, not looking at me, not taking her eyes off the concrete ripples of the robe at the feet of the Statue of Liberty just on our left, What you do is your own business, but don't expect me to love you forever if you do things like this. I'm not, she said, turning to look me full in the face, your mother, you know. All I am is your lover and nothing lasts forever.

When we got off the ferry, I said, I don't expect you to love me forever, and she said I was being promiscuous and quarrelsome, and she lit a cigarette as she walked

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down into the subway station. I watched her as she walked and it seemed to me to be the first time I had ever seen her back walking away from me, trailing a long blue string of smoke.

Something is going on with the boys, something has changed in the set of their faces, the way they hold their cigarettes, the way they nudge each other. Something changes when the light begins to fade and one of them says to me

—We have a clubhouse uptown, want to come there with us?

—What kind of club, I ask, what do you do there?

—We drink whisky, they say, and take drugs and watch television.

My boy, the one I have picked out of this whole city of boys stares out the window, chewing at a toothpick he's got wedged somewhere in the depths of his jaw, and runs his finger over the slick plastic of the steering wheel. I can tell by his refusal to ask that he wants me to come.

This, I suppose, is how to get to the center of boys, to go to their club. Boys are like pack creatures, and they always form clubs; it's as though they cannot help themselves. It's the single law of human nature that I have observed, in my limited exposure to the world, that plays and plays and replays itself out with simple mindless consistency: where there are boys there are clubs, and anywhere there is a club it is bound to be full of boys, looking for the good times to be had just by being boys.

—Can I join? I ask. This is what I can take back to her, cigarettes and a boy's club; this will keep her for me forever, that I have gone to the center of boys and have come back a woman and I have come back to her.

—Well, they say and smirk and grin and itch at themselves, Well, there's an initiation.

The oldest of the boys is younger than me, and yet like boys everywhere, they think that I don't know nearly so much as they do, as if being a woman somehow short-circuits my capacity for input. They think they have a language that only boys can understand, but understanding their language is the key to my success, so I say, I will not fuck you all, separately or together.

My boy looks over at me and permits himself a cool half smile and I am irritated that he now holds me in higher regard because I can speak a language that any idiot could learn.

Between us there are no small moments; we do not speak at all or we speak everything. Heat bills and toothpaste and dinner and all the dailiness of living are given no language in our time together.

I realize that this kind of intensity cannot be sustained over a long period of time and that every small absence in our days signals an end between us. She tells me that I must never leave her, but what I know is that some day she will leave me with a fistful of marriage money to pay the rent as long as rent control lasts in New York, and I will see her wandering down the streets, see her in the arms of another, and I say to her sometimes late at night when she blows smoke rings at my breasts, Don't leave me, don't ever ever ever leave me.

—Life, she always says to me, is one long leavetaking. Don't kid yourself, she says, Kid, and laughs.—Anyways, you are my little sweetheart, and how could I ever leave you and how could I leave this—soft touch on my skin—and this, and this.

She knows this kills me every time.

Their clubhouse is dirty and disorganized and everywhere there are mattresses and empty bottles and bags from McDonalds, and skittering through this mess are more roaches than I thought could exist in a single place, more roaches than there are boys in this city, more roaches than there are moments of love in this world.

The boys walk importantly in: This is their club, they are New York city boys and they take drugs and they have a club and I watch as they scatter around and sit in chairs and on mattresses and flip on the television. I hang back in the doorway and reach out to snag the corner of the jacket my boy is wearing. He turns and I say

—How about some air.

—Let me just get high first, he says, and he walks over to a chair and sits down and pulls out his works and cooks up his dope and ties up his arm and spends a good two minutes searching for a vein to pop.

All over his hands and arms and probably his legs and feet and stomach are signs of collapse and ruin, as if his body has been created for a single purpose and he has spent a busy and productive life systematically mining it for good places to fix.

I watch him do this while the other boys do their dope or roll their joints or pop their pills and he offers me some; I say no, I'd rather keep a clear head and how about some air.

I don't want him to hit a nod before any of it's even happened, but this is my experience with junkies, that they exit right out of every situation before it's even become a situation.

—Let's take the car, he says.

You are my sweetheart, she says, and if you leave me, you will spend all your life coming back to me. With her tongue and her words and the quiet movement of her hand over my skin, she has drawn for me all the limits of my life and of my love. It is the one love that has created me and will contain me and if I left her I'd be lonely, and I'd rather sleep in the streets with her hand between my legs forever than be lonely.

In the car, the boy slides his hand between my legs and then puts it on the steering wheel. A chill in the air, empty streets, and it's late. Every second takes me further into the night away from her; every second brings me home. We drive to Inwood Park and climb the fence, so that we are only a few feet away from the Hudson.

—This is nothing like Ohio, I say to him, and he lights a cigarette and says

—Where's Ohio.

—Don't you go to school? I ask him; Don't you have to take geography?

—I know what I need to know, he says, and reaches over to unbutton my blouse. The thing about junkies is

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that they know they don't have much time, and the thing about boys is that they know how not to waste it.

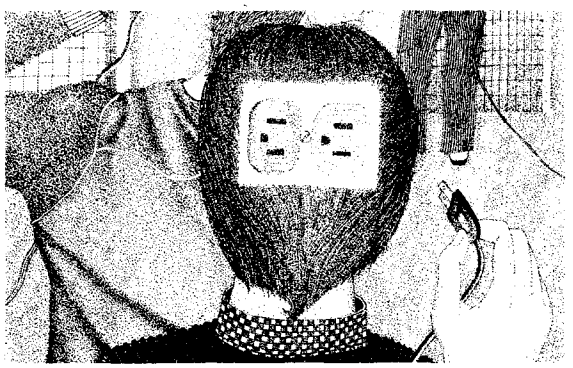
—This is very romantic, I say, as his fingers hit my nipples like a piece of ice; Do you come here often?

What I like about this boy is that he just puts it right in. He just puts it in as though he does this all the time, as though he doesn't usually have to slide it through his fingers or in between his friends' rough lips; he just puts it in and comes like wet soap shooting out of a fist and this is what I wanted. This is what I wanted and I look at the Hudson rolling by over his shoulder; this is what I wanted but all I think about is the way it is with us; this is what I wanted but all I see is her face floating down the river, her eyes like pieces of moonlight caught in the water.

What I think is true doesn't matter any more; what I think is false doesn't matter any more. What I think at all doesn't matter any more because there is only her; like an image laid over my mind, she is superimposed on every thought I have. She sits by the window and looks out onto West 83rd street as if she is waiting for something, waiting for rent control to end, or waiting for something else to begin. She sits by the window waiting for something and pulls a long string through her fingers. In the light from the window, I can see each of the bones in her hand; white and exposed, they make a delicate pattern that fades into the flesh and bone of her wrist.

—Don't ever change, I say to her, Don't ever ever change.

She smiles and lets the thin string dangle from her hand.



—Nothing ever stays the same, she says. You're old enough to know that, aren't you, little sweetheart? Permanence, she says, is nothing more than a desire for things to stay the same.

I know this.

—Life is hard for me, the boy says. What am I going to do with my life? I just hang around all day or drive my mother's car. Life is so hard. Everything will always be the same for me here in this city; it's going to eat me up and spit me out and I might as well have never been. He looks poetically out over the river.

—I wanted a boy, I say, not a poet.

—I'm not a poet, he says, I'm just a junkie, and you're nothing but a slut. You can get yourself home tonight.

I say nothing and watch the Hudson roll by.

—I'm sorry, he says. So what. So I'm a junkie and you're a slut, so what. Nothing ever changes. Besides, he says, my teacher wants me to be a track star because I can run faster than anyone else in gym class. That's what he says.

—Well, that sounds like a promising career, I say, although I can imagine the gym teacher's cock pressing against his baggy sweats as he stares at my boy and suggests after-school workouts. Why don't you do that?

—I'd have to give up smoking, he says, and dope.

Together we watch the Hudson roll by and finally he says

—Well, it's about time I was getting my mother's car home.

—This is it? I ask him.

—What were you expecting? he says, I'm only a junkie. In two years I probably won't even be able to get it up anymore.

—Look, I say, coming in and walking over to where she sits by the window. Look, I am a marked woman. There is blood between my legs and it isn't yours.

She looks at me, then looks back at what she was doing before I came in, blowing smoke rings that flatten against the dirty window.

—Did you bring me some cigarettes, she says, putting hers out in the ashtray that rests on the windowsill.

—A marked woman, I say. Can't you see the blood?

—I can't see anything, she says, and I won't look until I have a cigarette. I give her the cigarettes I bought earlier. Even in the midst of becoming a woman, I have remembered the small things that please her. She lights one and inhales the smoke, then lets it slowly out through her nose and her mouth at the same time. She knows this kills me.

—Don't you see it? I ask.

—I don't see anything, she says, I don't see why you had to do this.

She gets up and says, I'm going to bed now. I've been up all day and all night and I'm tired and I want to go to sleep before the sun comes up.

—I am a marked woman, I say, lying beside her, Don't you feel it?

—I don't feel anything, she says, but she holds me, and together we wait patiently for the light. She is everything to me. In the stiff morning before the full gloom of city light falls on us, I turn to her face full of shadows.

—I am a marked woman, I say, I am.

—Quiet, she says, and puts her dark hand gently over my mouth then moves it over my throat onto the rise of my chest. Across town, no one notices this, nothing is changed anywhere when she does this.

—Quiet, she says. She presses her hand against my heart and touches her face to mine and takes me with her into the motherless turning night. All moments stop here, this is the first and the last, and the only flesh is hers, the only touch her hand. Nothing else is, and together we turn under the stroke of the moon and the hiss of the stars and she is everything I will become and together we become every memory that has ever been known. □

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SANDRA ALCOSSER

THREE POEMS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PHILIP MAECHLING

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THE JOURNEY

1.

Hawk, he said
and ran to the window, happy
to see its black shape against the snow.
Months we'd been alone. The Christmas fir,
strung with candles and packets of pork fat,
laid abandoned beside our cabin,
the bald food of grackles.

But this was not melancholy weather,
our rooms thick with woodsmoke and lather.
It was my husband, his vacant hands.
Everything he owned—patched, dressed,
rewoven. Each dusk he split the kindling
to a thatch of perfect splinters, relit the fire
and began his long ritual of whiskey.

2.

One whole week the ice jammed and screamed
past our cabin. *Before the runoff,*
my husband said, *before the banks flood,*
we need to float the river to town.
The journey is dangerous in early spring, rain
to snow, then rain again and clawing sleet,
easy to lose the way.

We raced the braided channel through narrow canyons,
past gnarled cottonwoods and snow-silent meadows.
One grief-faced pileated woodpecker followed, tapping
his lonely branches. At dusk we beached the battered canoe
and climbed up to a ledge to sleep, my husband on one side,
and curled on the other, our silver dog, her greasy fur
reeking of pitch against my face.

All night the horizontal blizzard, snow sifting
over steep boulders and evergreens. By morning,
our heads rang like skillets with the cold, and below,
in the ragged waves, our boat torn loose. We stood
on a slice of rock, between overhanging forest
and river, a glass slope behind us, a waterfall
frozen silver, and nowhere to go but higher.

3.

Four miles we crashed through chest-high snow,
until I heard a bone crack and a limb snap from its socket.
I fell down sweating, my belly cramped and reeling.
We had reached a place where the drainage
widened out into flat field and high bare cirques.
I lay there whimpering while my husband
tramped a cross in the snow.

With gloved hands and branches, he shaped
a small cave. It took the whole day and most of the night.
I numbed to one place, unable to move, while the moon
rose and stars twirled as if they were on strings.
Afterwards we slid inside and rested there,
listening to each other's breath,
and I fell into a deep dreaming.

It was spring. The trees were steaming.
The geese sleeping on our footpath were white
and still as ladles. Two moths had beaten
free their tight cocoons and lay confused and green
in the sun. I placed a branch nearby.
They crawled its length and threw back their heads
in a swoon, their wings flapping like fresh laundry.

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4.

By the blue light of the snow cave
the veins shone in my husband's hands
and under his eyes, as if he wore his body
our whole married life like a shade. As if he
courted diversity, waiting for its glittering pain.
He always loved the forest best, the mountains
for their storms, their clattering plates of talus.

I was the timid one, finding interest
in the day's repetitions, treasure in the high grass
near home. I could have lived my whole life
in the lupine meadow. I was that happy.
I understood the cutworm, the mole, the silver ponds
where the muskrat floated, and dove all day
down into the corridors of shore weeds.

I remember how my husband whistled
when he butchered meat. *Come taste the raw*
antelope, he'd say. *It smells so sweet.*
Yesterday he brought me the stiff, purple
liver of our own dog, and when I
turned my head away, he smeared
his hand across my face.

5.

This is the first silent morning, my husband
gone away. He placed a leaf of lichen on my lips
for hunger, a ball of resin in my hands.
How quickly we take on the oddest half of another,
how easily we let it go. I crawl out on the smooth ice
and everywhere my husband's confused tracks,
his fragmented crosses.

Staring into the blank sun, I am content
to lie alone, to call back days so precise
they are like the red patches of a kestrel
in dark flight. The whole life of our cabin
whirrs about me. The poppies of summer
lay down their red skirts with the purple
nightshade and clover.

Now I move my hands in the dense wet snow and once again
I am the angel of childhood. How little I've changed
the physical world, content to lie in its wild lap.
Deep in my chest I can hear my own lungs clacking,
hardly the sound of an angel, more like the wings
of a small bird ascending or the high-pitched
elegy of a cicada.

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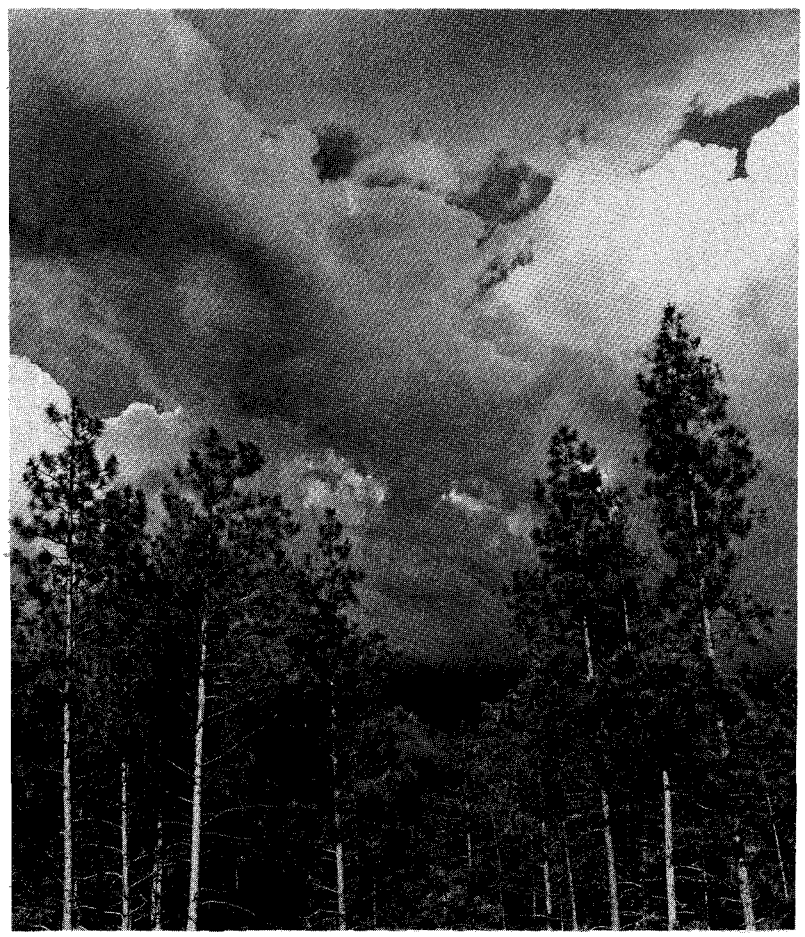
THE DISPOSITION OF HANDS

. . . like a swimmer in rapture in a wave
you wing your way blithely through boundless space.
—Baudelaire



1.

Because no one could find a cabin
in these green nappy woods,
only the hummingbird, with its red
throat and sugar-fast wings,
reminds me of the city.

The dead blooms are picked
from the white impatiens
and see how they flourish.
The horses are groomed,
the carrots thinned.
It is simple pleasure, over
and over the same song
rehearsing grace, the first
raspberry of summer, bursting,
or the cry of a red-tail, circling
as it dives on a dark vole
in the iridescent pasture.

2.

When the train curved and strained
against its full load of bodies,
David screamed, *please, I'm in pain.*
He'd followed me home again.
We stayed up all night in a diner
drinking coffee, David reciting
nursery rhymes.

It was wrong, the doctor said,
to follow an instinct. We sat in his office
the next morning, the air like wilted lettuce.
David is your patient.

July, and David stands
by the clinic desk in a wool coat
and stocking cap. *I'll kill myself,*
he says, *if you don't kiss me right now.*

His arms held hawk-wide,
he soars twelve stories
from an iron balcony, crashing
through a sportscar stalled in traffic.
David dead in the lap of a dying woman,
her mouth open, her hair
snapping like an orange flag.

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3.

We save what we can. Mostly small things.
I scrape the seeds from the last tomato,
the sweetest honeydew, place them
on a saucer to dry. I remember the smell
of ripe melon when I was five, rising
from the shore as I floated
in the shallows.

My father lay on the sand, handsome
in white trunks, drinking beer
and telling jokes with my uncles.
And then he was running down the pier,
a spade raised in his hand.
He sliced the water so fast, I thought
he'd cracked my head open.
But it was a water moccasin
he slammed on the dock, and
with the blade he chopped
its head free. I bobbed
in the water screaming.
When my father lifted me,
his whole body quivered.

Twenty years later, I stand
beside my father as he leaps
and swims in whiskey-deep slumber.
All night in the den, the lonely
song of a calculator, the ice
cracking in a glass.
I want to lift his head
and ask, *where does it hurt, Father?*
I toss a blanket over his shoulders instead.
If he woke we would
embarrass each other.

4.

We go on reaching. Our hands,
those graceful wings, desire.

Above the orchard each night
a bright object spins through a blizzard
of meteorites, like a bottle
tossed to the sky, a spaceship,
its brief message inside. It will
play the sounds of earth—chainsaw,
pitchpipe, the braying of humans—
to any life that finds it.

And for me, and for my family,
perhaps the grace of small deeds will suffice.
To remove the pine siskin from the cat's teeth,
to free the half-mad fox
from its trap. To carry tea and buttered
crackers to a dying aunt.

It is August. My family visits.
We lie out together in a bear grass meadow
sliding down to talus, ending in creekbed.
The Perseids streak overhead, their white bodies
leap to earth, a curtain of ice and dust ignited.

I watch my family—mother, father, husband—
their night clothes shivering in dawn wind,
their arms extended as though they too might
leap against the sky, and in that brief
hour before light, we are together, smiling,
sober, our limbs, our brains,
our one body glowing.

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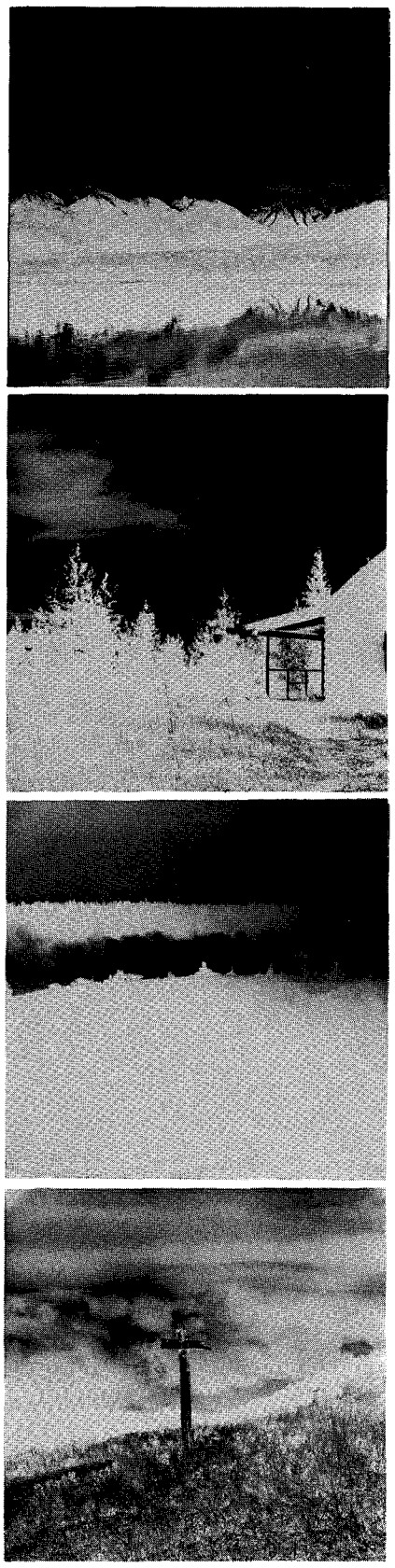

THE PHOTOGRAPHER DISCOVERS AMERICA

In a gray cottage in Massachusetts
he chooses a blemished pear for breakfast
biting into its florid cheek.

Two ballerinas practice floor technique
on the hardwood boards, pulling their pink stiletto
bodies toward each other.

The photographer regards them casually, the way a dog
scratches an ear for pleasure, rolling his milky eyes
in their sockets.

First there was the visiting Countess with spittle
on her chins. The nobles of France with lace hats
and furbelows. Loathsome Pomeranians.

He caught them all in his glass house, dissolved in silver
salt, paradise and its queer inventions—bicycles with white
wings rising slowly over grape hills in Provence.

And then, like Monet, he retired to his garden,
half-blind among the winking anemones, the high-kicking
begonias, the faint scent of dying vegetation.

But America wanted to be discovered.
His host, with the fine disposition and red pigeon eyes,
invited special guests.

They assemble in graceful positions.
It is harvest season, the tables sag with glazed pies
and ruffed grouse, hills roll by like filmstrips.

Images float inverted on his frosted glass.
The photographer isn't certain what he's supposed to photograph.
Now, for instance, the host's daughter stands against

the weathered barn, a straw basket on her right arm.
Come see harvest, her posture says, my crop of kale
with its difficult head and maroon petticoat.

Her white uncalloused hand beckons. She doesn't care
that the photographer is blind, her flax dress has no texture
for him, her chin, no line. She wants him to point

his lens and snap. She doesn't mind that she is no more
than a smear of flesh in a famous man's eye, sweet smelling,
confused with the incessant drone of flies.

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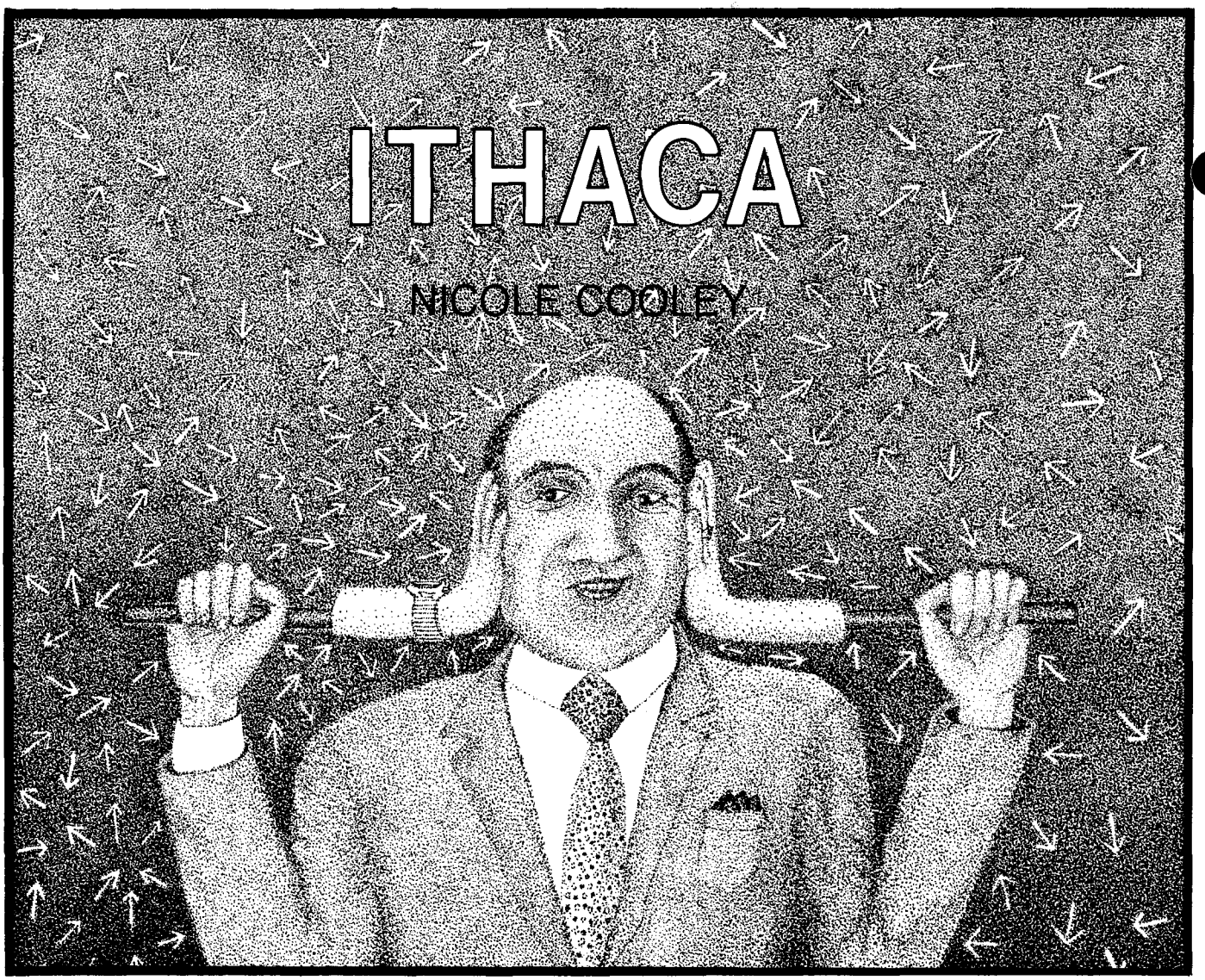

On the way, Janice reads a biography of Lucrezia Borgia. A long passage in the first chapter describes the family wine goblets, cleverly designed, with small traps for poison along the rims. The drawing on the opposite page shows the family before they were poisoned, Lucrezia sitting calmly among them, wearing a high-collared red dress and smiling, one of her husbands resting his hand on her shoulder. The book says it is debatable whether she caused all the deaths: no one can be sure. Janice admires Lucrezia's haughtiness.

"I think you're fixated on disaster," Charles tells her. "It isn't normal."

"What do you mean?"

"You draw attention to yourself by associating yourself with catastrophe." He glances back at her through the rearview mirror, waiting for a reaction.

They are driving to Ithaca to visit his sister. Janice reads in the back seat because Charles says she makes him nervous when she sits next to him. Besides the biography, she has brought a copy of *The Canterbury Tales*, which she hasn't read since high school. Charles has been working on a watercolor of the pilgrims on their way to Canterbury, and he checks the accuracy of his details against the book's. Janice likes to read the Middle English aloud to herself; the syllables twist her tongue against her teeth in a pleasant, unfamiliar way.

"I'm glad we're getting out of New York," Charles says. "No one stays in the city for the holidays." His sister, Margaret, lives alone in Ithaca and says marriage would ruin her independence. She wears carefully applied nail polish and wool suits, with matching hats pinned to her hair in the winter. When Charles describes Margaret, he labels her as "competent" and "capable." Her organization makes Janice feel clumsy. Margaret is president of the Junior League in Ithaca and devotes most of her time to what she calls "causes." These include distributing food stamps, restoring parks, and—the one she seems to like best—working at St. Elizabeth's, the orphan's home. Last year, Janice helped Margaret deliver Christmas baskets to the home. Janice knew she should feel sorry for them, but she thought the orphans looked small and evil, like creatures out of a Bosch painting.

Margaret still bakes the family Christmas pudding from a recipe she claims has been handed down from King

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George III. Inside, dropped in the batter and left to bake, are the traditional symbols—a coin, a bone button, a silver ring. The coin stands for chance, the button for faith, and the ring for a happy marriage.

Another of Margaret's projects is speaking before the Ladies' Hospital Guild and high school assemblies, urging donations of body parts. She herself seems eager to give up her eyes, her lungs, possibly her heart. At her instigation, Janice and Charles filled out forms promising they would donate everything to science when they died. Charles says he hates the whole idea and would rather not think about it. Janice imagines the transfer of an eye, like a tiny plant; she wonders how the doctors would preserve her heart.

"You don't talk anymore. Is it something I've done?" Charles sounds annoyed.

Janice has spread the *Times* over the car seat. "A fire destroyed that cathedral on Lexington Avenue last night," she says to him; "the symphony children's chorus was in the choir loft. They didn't know what was happening until it was too late to jump." She leans forward to show him the blurry photograph. "So elegant—the boys and girls in their long white robes peering out, the flames rising against the stained glass. It's beautiful."

Charles clicks on the radio. More news. A woman in Rochester murdered her husband and hanged herself the next day. "Do you want to play cards?" Charles says. "We could do that now. Shall I pull over to the side of the road for a while?" Janice shakes her head because she can't remember any card games except a certain kind of solitaire where the cards are supposed to be arranged in pairs. She never got the knack of it.

They haven't been away together all year, except for a trip to Mexico last summer when Charles had a magazine assignment to do photographs of Oaxaca. At first Janice was eager to go. She took Spanish lessons but couldn't learn the language properly because she thought it so ugly. The first evening in Mexico City, the prostitutes called to Charles from their balconies, and pedlars shouted from behind tables stacked with cheap blue and silver jewelry. Everything weighed on her; she could hardly breathe, so she spent the rest of the vacation in the hotel room alone, since Charles refused to give up the assignment and go home. Every day after photographing the village in the morning, he brought her bottled water and slices of fruit from the market.

Now the cassette recorder on the dashboard plays Scarlatti. "I hate harpsichords," Charles says, and presses the eject button. Janice thinks the music sounds like steps, each note giving way to the next, rising. He turns the radio back on, this time to a talk show. The guest is a famous psychotherapist.

"What can I do?" a woman is asking, frantic. "My sister and I are identical twins, but everyone thinks we're the same person, that there's only one of us."

"Jesus," Charles says and spins the dial before Janice can hear the reply.

She and Charles met in college in their junior year. They took physics, a required course in which the teacher, an old man who talked very rapidly, stood at the bottom of an amphitheater and rolled red and yellow balls down a slanted tray to show velocity and distance. Several of Charles's photographs were being displayed at an off-campus gallery, and he sent everyone in the physics class a typed card announcing the exhibit. Janice thought this was pretentious, but she went anyway because the theme of the show was the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, and she was curious. Few people were there, and Charles invited her out to dinner.

"Do you still think of yourself as an abandoned wife?" Charles asks.

His question takes her back to the fall night when they separated after they had argued all day. It was Halloween. Children draped in sheets and masks rang the doorbell again and again, and Janice left Charles shouting at her from the back of the apartment so she could greet the trick-or-treaters with candy. She commented to Charles on the absurdity of the situation. He said, "I don't see how you can excuse yourself by trying to make this funny." He told her he was tired of everything.

"You mean you're tired of me," Janice said, pleased by her power, under stress, to use the kind of exact expression Charles would appreciate. She had asked him what she should do; he told her to call his sister, then left the house. Margaret was polite. She invited Janice to come to Ithaca for a while, saying she could help her with a new League project because Janice should keep busy, but Janice declined.

Charles was gone for three weeks, staying at an artists' colony in Vermont. He telephoned every few days to see how she was doing. Janice thought he was giving her openings to ask him to come back. She passed the time by reading. Margaret gave her four cartons of old books, all alphabetized and ordered. Janice piled the vacant half of the bed with them—art books, African folk tales, botany guides. She planned to read everything in the boxes, beginning with "A" and working her way through the alphabet, but Charles returned before she had even finished "B."

He came back at the end of November, bringing a suitcase full of new ink drawings and an art student named Miranda. Charles assured Janice that his feelings for Miranda were paternal, that she shouldn't worry. Miranda was a large, clumsy girl, with red hair that looked to have been ironed straight and flat against her back. She drank liqueurs, and unfinished bottles of creme de cacao and ginger brandy began appearing on tables and behind chairs around the apartment. She seemed always to be carrying a small, sugar-stained glass. Before Miranda returned to school, she did a portrait of Charles, and he asked her to paint Janice in beside him, his hand on her shoulder. Miranda kept the picture for her portfolio. Charles said it was just a student exercise, but Janice had liked the soft arc of shadow around them, and the way their faces seemed to fit, so comfortably, together.

"Abandoned?" Janice says, testing the sound of the word before she applies it to herself. "No, I don't think so." □

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BINK NOLL

THE DRESSING ROOM

is the smallest room
the most private in the house,
takes me from the naked
to the presentation self
thought-out and dear
—is a function of
my dazzled vanity.

I suck in my gut,
then turn sideways
to the full-length mirror
so the boy in me can look
at what he loved and loves still
without reserve.
I think of myself as a still
sexy man, yet the boy
chooses not to look long
at what, ten years ago,
set infatuation on foot.
Except for my truelove, who
that I want to give it to
wants my sex? At such a moment
of keen discovery
life strikes me as much too long.

My most successful fantasy is *dignity*.
To exit from this little room
I dress up my stubborn nudity
in magisterial disguises:
stuffs from remote mills,
tailoring by serene old houses,
shoes that cost a week's pay,
neckties that exert authority.

—dress up my immortal part, the *id*,
in that mild ostentation
of the upper class. After all,
who else has dressing rooms?
I'll walk out Correct. Privileged.
Ordained. On occasion Sumptuous.
But that little he, the *id*:
not for one whole day has he felt
satisfied, ever—rampaging beneath
the costume of my education.

Now, once I exit, for hours
I play all the harmonies
of my good breeding, that cheer,
that careless charm, that need
to be attractive and unfaithful,
amorous innuendo toward everyone,
hitting the high C's of urbanity.

At the end there is no deserving,
no silly falling in love,
just the power of garments,
flattering good manners
to make me feel good—
and proper, too—despite
the dead end of my errant lust.
Even my little *he* has tried
to behave as good as
a Victorian boy
although he gave me away
in the urgent roving
of our mutual eye.

Back home I hang clothes up,
toss deposits in the dirty wash.
The littlest room has turned
into the undressing room.
Within two minutes I am smiling
at this brute having to be bathed,
requiring love that does not blink.
And I count myself a lucky man,
for in the next room such truelove waits,
that other *id* lurking and focused.
I smell myself and, like everyone else,
like the smell I am. Yes. I like
this being back to undressédness.
I am relieved as well
that now the vain boy
is to be slaked at last.

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MAKING IT WORK

PAT RUSHIN

Sammy made love with Emily and Emily said it was good. So Sammy made love with Emily again and Emily said it was better. Then Emily told Mary and Mary met Sammy in a bar and rubbed her stockinged foot up Sammy's leg so Sammy made love with Mary and Mary said it was fantastic. Then Mary told Kathy and Kathy told Nora and Nora introduced Sammy to Carol and Carol mentioned it to Sarah so Sammy made love with each of them and all of them said they were delighted.

Then Sammy visited his parents for dinner and Sammy's father said when are you

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going to settle down son but Sammy said he wasn't ready. Then Sammy's mother started crying and Sammy didn't know what to do. Sammy said what's wrong mom but Sammy's mother just kept on crying and wouldn't eat her roast beef. So Sammy said to his father what's wrong with mom and Sammy's father said ah Sammy she's going through the change and everything's a trial for her.

But Sammy's mother blew her nose in her paper napkin and told them the change had nothing to do with it. She was upset because of her only child: thirty years old with a lousy job with no future and all he wanted to do was tomcat around with tramps and worse instead of bringing home some nice young girl and getting married and raising nice grandchildren for her.

Sammy's father said she's got a point there son and Sammy didn't know what to say.

So Sammy said I'm only twenty-nine mom and I'm not crazy about working the assembly line the rest of my life either but listen: once I decide to do something I do it. I'm thinking of taking a course in computer programming or something so my future will work out okay and I'll bring home all kinds of nice girls and get married and have kids and everything but look: your idea of nice girls is not too easy to find anymore.

Sammy's father said he's got a point there dear.

But Sammy's mother said no he doesn't. Sammy just wasn't looking in the right places. You look for girls in bars and you find tramps or worse. You look for girls in the right places like in Sammy's mother's church social group for instance and you find nice girls like the daughter of the chairwoman of Sammy's mother's church social group's bake sale. Sammy's mother met the girl last week when she complimented Sammy's mother's tollhouse cookies and she was a sweet pretty nice young girl in her last year at St. Vincent's studying to be a nurse. Sammy's mother said her name is Felicia and I can call her mother and arrange a date for you.

Sammy said oh mom please but Sammy's father said it won't kill you son and Sammy's mother wouldn't stop crying unless Sammy agreed so Sammy agreed.

So Sammy's mother called Felicia's mother and they arranged a date and Sammy picked up Felicia at her apartment and she seemed like a nice young girl with long wavy blonde hair and a nice figure in a tweed skirt and a smiling face with hardly any make-up so Sammy took her to a movie he'd already seen with hardly any sex in it and then back to her apartment. Felicia said she shared the apartment with her younger sister Bainsley but Bainsley was out with this guy Roger who Bainsley said she was in love with only she hardly knew him since she just met him last week at the community college library. Felicia said it was just infatuation and she couldn't see it: Roger was a dope. But anyway Felicia and Sammy had the apartment to themselves.

Then Felicia put on some soft jazz and poured some wine and brought out a compact mirror and a razor blade and a little vial of cocaine and Sammy laughed and told Felicia how his mother told him what a sweet pretty nice young girl Felicia was and how he agreed now one-hundred percent. Felicia said she heard Sammy was nice too and Sammy said yeah every mother's son is nice but Felicia said she wasn't talking about what she heard from Sammy's mother: she heard it from her sister Bainsley who heard it from her friends Carol and Sarah.

Then Felicia said let's dance so Sammy danced with her close and slow and Felicia whispered things in Sammy's ear in a voice hushed and moist so Sammy and Felicia made love on the floor with most of their clothes on.

Then a key turned the doorlatch and they jumped up and Sammy saw a young slim girl with short fluffy blonde hair watching him zip his zipper. Sammy blushed but the girl smiled and said she hoped she hadn't interrupted anything.

Felicia said just barely not. This is my sister Bainsley: Bainsley meet Sammy.

Bainsley shook Sammy's hand and Felicia said I thought you were staying with Roger tonight. Bainsley said not tonight and she kissed Felicia on the cheek and sat on the sofa.

So Sammy and Felicia and Bainsley snorted some cocaine and drank some wine and Bainsley pulled a pipe out of her purse and some hash too and they all smoked and lounged on the sofa and Bainsley talked about how happy she was to be in love: it felt so good. Felicia stretched out with her head in Sammy's lap and her eyes closed and her hair fanning out and waving to and fro to the rhythm of the plaintive tenor sax and said how Bainsley fell in love with a new man every other new moon. Sammy stroked Felicia's hair and looked at Bainsley slouched next to him with the slit in her dress riding high up her thigh and he looked away.

Bainsley said it's tough to make love work but I try at least and this thing with Roger is the real thing.

Then they drank more and smoked more and Felicia said she was tired and she led Sammy off towards her bedroom and Bainsley winked and said have fun you guys and Felicia and Sammy got into her kingsize waterbed and made love again and Felicia said I like you Sammy and Sammy said I like you too and they fell asleep. But Sammy woke up in the middle of the night and heard the stereo still playing and he wondered if Bainsley had gone to bed yet or what.

So Sammy saw Felicia again and again and they made love all the time. Sammy's mother said she was so happy he was finally spending time with a nice girl and Sammy's mother and Felicia baked cookies together and talked and giggled and Sammy's father asked Sammy if they should expect an announcement soon. Sammy said you never know.

Then Sammy told Felicia he was in love with her and Felicia told Sammy she was in love with him too and Sammy said he meant really in love and Felicia said she meant really in love too and they laughed and got serious and made love and drove to the zoo for the afternoon. They took Bainsley with them and they told her they were in love and Bainsley said she was so happy for them because love was wonderful and Bainsley saw a big hairy ape at the zoo and she said it reminded her of Roger and she smiled wickedly.

So Sammy told his parents and Sammy's mother cried she was so happy and Sammy's father said I'm proud of

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you son. Then Sammy talked to Felicia's parents and they said they were thrilled except they asked Felicia what about Sammy's job. So Sammy enrolled in night school for computer technology and worked days at the plant and Felicia's parents announced the engagement and Sammy saw it in the paper and told Felicia it looked good and everybody was very happy.

Then Sammy was drinking in a bar after work. Emily came in dressed in a pair of raggedy cutoffs and a high-waisted leather vest tied up the front with loose leather thongs. Emily's straight black hair was braided thick down her back and she sat on the stool next to Sammy's and told him she heard he was getting married.

Sammy said that's right.

Emily said congratulations and she kissed Sammy and when she drew away her dark eyes danced.

Then Emily bought Sammy a beer and then another and when he tried to buy one for her she bought him another and said it's on me. Emily put her foot on the top rung of Sammy's barstool and she rested her elbow on her knee and Sammy saw her cutoffs were high and tight and threadbare all along the edges and Sammy said your sandal is loose and Emily put her foot on top of Sammy's barstool between his legs and Sammy tied it for her.

Then Emily said really she couldn't believe Sammy was getting married. Not Sammy. He wasn't the type.

Sammy said well I am and Emily laughed and said congratulations again and she kissed Sammy and ran one hand up the back of his neck and held him.

Sammy said thank you. Sammy said I should get going: I have a class tonight. Emily said just one more and Sammy said okay: maybe just one more. Emily smiled and stared into his eyes. Then she said so what do you say Sammy.

Sammy said what do you mean but Emily touched him and smiled some more and said come on Sammy. You know what I mean: don't act so innocent.

Sammy said you tempt me Emily: you know that. Sammy said but I can't. I'm engaged. I'm in love. I'm doing this right.

Emily lowered her eyes and ran her tongue over her lower lip and touched Sammy again.

Sammy said don't.

Emily smiled and kept on touching him. She ran a long fingernail up the seam of his jeans and kept on smiling.

Sammy said oh Emily: I'm asking you please don't.

But Emily kept on doing what she was doing and she wouldn't stop until Sammy grabbed both of her hands in his and held them tight and told her really he was in love and he was getting married and he wanted it to work and he couldn't fool around.

Then Emily sighed and said oh okay I'm sorry and she hugged Sammy around the neck and kissed his forehead. Emily said I thought maybe we could get together again but I see now you're serious so I'll leave you alone. Emily stood then and Sammy looked up at her and Emily bent and kissed him a sweet kiss on the lips and Sammy reached up and hung onto her braid with one hand.

Then Felicia came in.

Felicia said I called you from the hospital and you weren't home so I figured you might have stopped here after work. I thought I'd drive you to class. You're going to be late.

So Sammy left with Felicia and Felicia said who was that and Sammy said an old girlfriend and Felicia said why were you kissing her and Sammy said you won't believe this. Felicia said then don't bother telling me but Sammy said no I have to. Then Sammy tried to explain but Felicia didn't respond.

They got to Sammy's school and Sammy said are you mad but Felicia wouldn't answer so Sammy said let's go home: we have to talk.

So Felicia drove them back to her place and on the way she started talking. Sammy said don't talk like that but Felicia kept on talking. When they got inside the apartment they were arguing and Bainsley and Roger were at the table eating dinner and trying not to notice so Sammy and Felicia went into her bedroom. Then Felicia accused Sammy again of being unfaithful to her.

Sammy said I can't stand it when you talk this way. You're hard and bitchy and you aren't listening. I wasn't unfaithful to you. I'll never be unfaithful to you. I love you.

Felicia said sure you love me. That's why you were kissing that woman.

Sammy said I wasn't really kissing her. She was kissing me. I was trying to resist her when you walked in.

Felicia said it didn't look like Sammy was resisting very hard and Sammy said oh you don't understand.

Felicia said I understand: I understand more than you think. Felicia said I know about all your old girlfriends. I know you played around with a lot of women. I'm no fool. I understand maybe you can't be satisfied with just one woman.

Sammy said that's not true but Felicia said don't lie to me anymore so Sammy tried to hold her. Sammy said I love you: I'm not lying. But Felicia pulled away from him and ran out of the bedroom and out of the apartment slamming the door behind her. Sammy walked into the living room and Bainsley and Roger were sitting on the sofa watching teevee with the sound way up. Roger's shirt was open and he rubbed his hairy stomach and scratched his beard and looked up at Sammy and Sammy didn't know what to say.

Roger took his feet off the coffee table and smiled and shook his head and said looks like you two had a little tiff. Bainsley took her hand off Roger's leg and leaned forward and said maybe you feel like talking about it so Sammy told them what happened. Roger said don't worry about it: it's probably just that time of the month. Sammy said no it's not. Bainsley said maybe it's the pill: I told Felicia not to go on the pill because it plays hell with your moods.

Then Sammy sat down and put his head in his hands and said he didn't know what he was supposed to do. Roger said he didn't have to do anything: Felicia would come back after she calmed down and realized how wrong she was. But Bainsley stood up and paced back and forth and told Sammy he should go out looking for Felicia right now because you never know what's going to happen.

Bainsley said I have a friend who had a sister who was going out with this guy and they got in a fight and she ran

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out and he didn't follow her and then my friend's sister never came back because she was driving her car and she lost control and rammed her car head-on into a semi. She was killed. The guy felt terrible and he ended up committing suicide.

So Sammy ran out of the apartment and onto the street and he didn't even know where to look but he ran around the block and saw Felicia walking very fast and he caught up with her and pulled her to him and said he was sorry and he loved her more than anything and he would never do anything to hurt her ever again. Sammy was crying and he fell to his knees and hugged Felicia around the waist and she grabbed his hair in her fists and cried and Sammy said we'll never fight like this again: I love you too much. Felicia said I love you too and I don't want to fight.

Then they fought once more and then they fought again but both times they said they wouldn't do it anymore.

Then Sammy and Felicia were sitting undressed in her bed and they were fighting. Felicia said Sammy was *too* looking at that woman in the restaurant tonight. Sammy said what woman did she mean: he wasn't looking at any woman. Felicia said oh really: what woman weren't you looking at. Sammy said he wasn't looking at every woman in the place. Sammy said I especially wasn't looking at the woman I think you think I was looking at. Felicia said which woman was that. Sammy sighed and said the one in the black evening dress with the cornrowed hair and don't even say it Felicia because I know you think I was looking at her but I wasn't. I just couldn't help noticing her: that's all.

Felicia said sometimes I get the feeling you can't help noticing every woman but me. How am I supposed to feel.

Sammy said you're really neurotic. You're nuts. This jealousy thing is making you goofy.

Felicia said I want your attention: that's all.

Sammy said you have my attention. I'm marrying you.

Felicia said that's not enough. Sometimes I think you're only marrying me because you feel it's time you were married. Face it Sammy. You really don't want to get married. You're still looking around.

Sammy said no I'm not looking around. You just think I'm looking around because you're so goddamn insecure. You say you love me. Love is based on trust. Without trust love means nothing. Without trust love can't work.

Felicia said what do you mean by that.

Sammy said I mean your distrust is ruining our relationship.

Felicia said you don't want to get married. I knew it. You're backing out.

Sammy said yes he did want to get married and he wanted to marry her and live with her and love her all the rest of his life but she wasn't making it easy for him. Felicia said it's not supposed to be easy. If you want it to be easy then you don't really want to marry me. Maybe you should forget about it and just do what you want and go to bed with every woman you see.

Sammy shook his head and grabbed fistfuls of his hair and said you're driving me crazy.

Then there was a soft tap at the door and it opened and Bainsley stood in the doorway and she turned on the overhead light and she was crying.

Sammy pulled the sheet up to cover himself and Bainsley said I'm sorry but I need somebody to talk to. Felicia said what's wrong baby.

Bainsley said I'm drunk. Roger dumped me tonight and I don't want to be alone. I have a gram of coke and I want to feel better but I feel bad right now and I don't want to feel bad all by myself: I need you guys tonight. I want you to sit up with me and do coke with me and talk with me and make me feel good about myself.

Felicia said oh my poor baby and Sammy said just let us get dressed and we'll be right out but Bainsley said don't bother and she left and came back dressed in her sleeveless terrycloth robe and she climbed onto the big bed and sat between them on top of the sheets. She pulled the coke stuff out of her pocket and they snorted some lines and she hugged Sammy and Felicia around their necks and said she felt better already. Then her bottom lip puffed out and she started crying again so Sammy cut some more lines and they snorted them.

Bainsley said I can't believe he dumped me and Felicia said did Bainsley feel like talking about it.

Then Bainsley told them how Roger found out she wasn't using any artificial birth control and how she tried to tell him that everything on the market was just too unromantical or else gave you cancer or heart attacks or strokes or cramps or infections. She tried to tell him she was using the symptothermic rhythm method and how it was just as safe as a diaphragm if you used it right and that was why certain days out of the month she wouldn't make love with him because she was ovulating. She should have told him before probably because as soon as she told him tonight Roger dumped her.

Sammy said all this time and that jerk didn't even know but Bainsley said please don't call him a jerk even though maybe he is: he knew I wasn't using a diaphragm but I guess he thought I had an I.U.D. or something although he never bothered to ask. How come my love affairs never work. How come I can't meet some nice guy like you Sammy. There must be something wrong with me.

But Felicia said don't blame yourself honey. Let's face it: Roger's a sexist dope and he doesn't respect you or your body and you're better off without him. Sammy said that's right: you're a beautiful young woman Bainsley and you can do much better than Roger. Any man would be dying to have you.

Bainsley sniffed and said do you really think so and Sammy said absolutely and he touched her hand and Felicia held Bainsley's other hand and said listen to Sammy: Sammy doesn't lie.

Sammy looked at Felicia and she smiled at him.

Then Bainsley started sobbing so Felicia hugged Bainsley to her and cooed soothing words in her ear and the sheet dropped to Felicia's waist and Sammy didn't know what to do. Sammy stroked Bainsley's short fluffy hair and said it's okay baby and Bainsley turned and hugged Sammy around the neck and kissed his cheek and Felicia kissed Bainsley's cheek and Sammy kissed Bainsley's cheek all wet and salty and Bainsley kissed Felicia

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and Bainsley's robe came loose and Sammy saw soft roundness rising with each sob and Sammy didn't know what to do so he kissed Bainsley's neck. Bainsley turned to Sammy and kissed his lips still crying and Sammy said don't cry Bainsley but she kept on crying and Felicia started crying so Sammy hugged them both and kissed them and Felicia kissed Bainsley's hair and Bainsley clung to Sammy's neck and Sammy kissed Felicia's ear and Felicia whispered oh God and Bainsley gasped and sobbed and Sammy twitched and rolled and they all made love together and the waterbed sloshed and ebbed.

Then Bainsley rolled over and smiled through her tears and said that was beautiful.

But Felicia said I can't believe we did that. That wasn't natural. I've never even thought of doing something like that.

Bainsley said it's okay. Don't feel bad. You guys made me feel happy and nothing that makes you feel happy is unnatural.

But Felicia said the coke made you feel happy and we wouldn't have done this if we weren't so high.

Then Sammy spoke up and said don't spoil it like that Felicia. We enjoyed ourselves. I know I did and I know Bainsley did and I know you did too. I could tell. It happened. Let's at least admit it was good.

Felicia said just because it was good that doesn't mean it was right. What would our parents say if they knew. What would your mother say Sammy.

Sammy said they wouldn't understand. None of them.

Felicia said I'm not sure I understand.

Then Bainsley rubbed tears from her eyes and said I don't like you guys talking like this. You make me feel guilty. You make it seem like it shouldn't have happened. I don't want to feel guilty about this.

Then Felicia looked at Bainsley and she kissed her forehead and said you're right. You're both right. It happened. I enjoyed it. We shouldn't feel guilty about it. I guess it proves how close we are and that makes me feel good. But that doesn't mean it has to happen again.

Bainsley raised her eyebrows and said she really wouldn't mind if it happened again and she looked at Sammy.

But Sammy said no your sister's probably right Bainsley: when we talk about a thing like this we're talking the kind of thing that hardly ever works out for the better even though it might work out very nice in the short run. The thing to do is say okay: we had a good time but that's it.

Felicia agreed with Sammy one hundred percent so Bainsley said okay I guess we won't make love with each other all together again and Sammy said I guess not.

But Bainsley didn't feel like sleeping alone especially after all the excitement and Felicia said she might as well sleep with her and Sammy and Sammy had no objections so they cuddled up and kissed each other goodnight and went to sleep. Then Sammy woke up in the middle of the night and he felt a warm hand on his right leg and a soft face breathing moist against his left shoulder and Sammy didn't know what to do.

So then they all made love again anyway. □

DABNEY STUART

TRACES OF A BICAMERAL MIND

1. *One Way*

What will I remember,
dying? What will I kiss?
Will it be the same mouth?

I know that after we have looked into the dark
long enough it seems we are blind
and not simply looking at darkness.

Whatever looks back at me, it is
not myself, nor the years of this making,
nor my furtive wish to have done with it.

The mouth of my life.

2. *Night Air*

I know that after we have looked into the dark
long enough it seems we are blind
and not simply looking at darkness.
Nobody's eyes adjust. We realize at last
we are surrounded. It's dark now

and if I should speak through my blindness,
fine particles of sound, a kind of dust,
would enter the dark,

not as a man enters a woman,
but as air enters the lungs
of creatures, breathing.

The darkness would change them
into something no one could recognize,
or trace,

not as the zygote couldn't recognize
the egg, the sperm, or so improbable a joining,

but as a crazed man who hears
in his ear, which is the ear of the world,
a thickness he cannot touch
growing, might ask

What is this which devours me?

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In Limestone Country

Earth is a ball of rock, soupy in the middle and crusty near the surface. People forget this, living in places where dirt or water or pavement hide the planet under a thick skin. But where the covering is flimsy, and rock noses up through topsoil and shoulders out from the banks of rivers, people remember. They clear stone from their fields, swear at it, swear by it, pile it up to build houses and fences and banks, carry tales about it on their tongues, bear its weight in their minds.

The presence of stone is unusually strong in a rumpled belt of hills and creekbeds in southern Indiana. Never wider than fifteen miles, about forty miles long, this rag of land has supplied limestone for buildings all across America. I have spent the past year exploring this region, crawling down into quarries, rambling through mills, talking with people. Here are four of my encounters in limestone country.

Near the village of Needmore there is a graveyard atop a knobby hill surrounded on three sides by abandoned quarries. You reach the cemetery on the fourth side along a gravel drive. Raspberries, just coming ripe, lapped against the side of my car as I rolled up to the locked gate one morning late in June. I had the place to myself. From the borders of the cemetery ox-eye daisies gazed their dark gaze at me. Daylilies burned a fierce orange. Yucca plants lifted their pale flickering blossoms.

I had come here searching for limestone gravemarkers, especially ones that bear the imprint of private feelings. And I was not disappointed. The first headstone I spied was a homemade job, carved with unsure hand on a rough slab, for a boy who had died at the age of nine in the last year of World War II. In the upper righthand corner was the inscription, ASLEEP IN JESUS, with the J written backwards, the way my six-year-old son used to write it a couple of years ago. In the upper left was a kindergarten sun, light beams radiating out from it in squiggly lines. The picture might have been carved on the wall of a cave fifty thousand years ago, it was so elemental a sign of hope.

I was on my belly in the grass, studying this marker, when a car grit-

ted down the drive and pulled to a stop behind mine. The man who emerged from the cloud of gravel dust was about seventy, a slow-stepper, wearing baggy blue workpants, a white shirt, a ballcap emblazoned with the Goodyear insignia, and sun glasses that turned his eyes into blank windows. His cheek bulged with chewing tobacco and his right front pocket bulged with a revolver. I could see the blond handle, cross-hatched for easy gripping. Was my visitor trying to drum up more business for the graveyard? As he approached, I kept my eye on his right hand.

We exchanged howdies, mine cautious, his cold. He leaned to spit, shifted his chaw, shifted his feet, then just stood there behind the blank windows of his glasses, as if waiting to be told what in the devil a bearded fellow was doing with a camera and a notebook in Hopkins Cemetery at eight o'clock in the morning. So I told him I was hunting limestone.

As soon as that word hit the air, he thawed out. "They ain't nothing much around here *but* limestone." He shoved hands in pockets—for a quick draw?—and then set off talking. He was the caretaker for this place, kept it mowed, kept the plastic flowers in their holders, kept his eye on visitors. The burying plot had been donated to the township by a guy named Hopkins, who sold all the surrounding land to the limestone companies. Quarry holes yawned out there in any direction you cared to look. "There's good stone right under where we're standing. We only dig the graves four feet deep. If we had to go six, we couldn't bury anyone without drills and dynamite." Most all the dead belonged to stone families, whose menfolk worked in the quarries and mills. For markers they favored limestone. "Worked all their lives in it, and now they're buried on top of it and underneath it. Just like a sandwich."

The combination of gun and hand in his pocket still worried me. When he paused to spit, I asked him why he packed it along. "On account of that Leggo boy who's been hiding around this cemetery since he broke out of jail," he answered. "I don't expect he'd shoot me. I been knowing him all his life. But you can't never tell about kids." I'd never heard of the infamous Leggo boy, so the caretaker filled me in on the history. He was a local tough, eighteen or so, grew up right here in Needmore. Not long ago he broke into an aluminum stamping plant down the road, a brick leviathan of a building that used to be the Furst-Kerber limestone mill. The sheriff caught up with him, put the boy in the Bedford jail. Next visiting hours, Leggo's mother came to see him with a pistol in her purse. The sheriff found the gun, got mad, sent the boy to the state penitentiary for small-timers, up near Indianapolis. Next visiting hours the mother came to see him, and blame if Leggo didn't walk right straight out the door with her, pretending he was just a visitor.

Since the jailbreak, the mother had been making frequent trips down the cemetery drive to leave groceries for young Leggo. "I seen him in the woods and the quarries three or four times, but never close enough to grab. The police had squad cars and a helicopter out here looking for him the day before yesterday, but they never did find him. He could hide in them quarries for ten years and nobody'd ever run him out. There's old guys have *lived* out there, winter and summer, wild as bears."

Pause for a spit. Then: "His old lady give him a gun, of course. But I don't think he'd shoot anybody except the sheriff. You ought to be all right. Just so long as he don't take you for a detective, you don't have to sweat."

When the caretaker was gone I sweated anyway, less on account of June than on account of Leggo. I tried to decide which of the pair sounded like the meaner customer, the jailbird or the mother. I felt like ringing a bell and declaring that I wasn't a detective, that I was neutral

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in this whole affair. I kept listening for the grit of Mrs. Leggo's tires, for the click of Leggo's gun. Instead, from across the field of quarries, I heard the humph of the aluminum stamping plant, humph humph like an asthmatic dragon.

I browsed among the graves. The ground felt spongy under my boots. Limestone markers from last century lay tumbled, heaved over more likely by frost than by vandals. The names were mostly ones that people around here still wear: Patton, Turpin, Swango, Grayson, Campbell, Holtsclaw, Sears. On the headstone for a child, dead at four, rested a small wooden car. Rain and sun had bleached the wood to the color of ivory. I lifted the car, amazed to find it loose, amazed that no one had stolen it in the years since the child's death. I set it down again, scooted it back and forth to make sure the stiff wheels still rolled.

While I prowled through the cemetery, I imagined Leggo out there hiding in the crevices of stone. There were plenty of crevices to choose from. The quarries to the north were shallow and scrubby, grown up in sycamores and sumac. Immediately to the south opened the vast gulf of the Empire State Building hole. I stood on the lip staring down a hundred feet or so into the green water, and tried to stuff the skyscraper, block by chunky imagined block, into that enormous pit. Think of a domed stadium, squash it into the shape of a box, and you will have some notion of the size of that emptiness. Beyond this gulf the gouges and rubble heaps stretched southward for miles toward Oolitic and Bedford, the largest cluster of building stone quarries in the world. The snort of cranes and the machine-gun rattle of air-drills sounded from a working pit down that way.

East of the burying ground was another sheer drop of ninety feet or so, down to the water of a junk-filled quarry. One glimpse, and I understood the sign I had seen on a hogwire fence when driving up: "Please do not throw trash in the cemetery. There is a dump at the back." Junkyard behind graveyard. Down below, trash spread across the pit like a river delta—car bodies rusted the color of a rooster's crown, bullet-riddled stoves and washers, televisions, buggies, bottles, a jigsaw puzzle of torn plastic. I remembered one of the stories about how Needmore got its name. When the village was still small enough to shout across, a slick visitor from the East was asked what the place needed in order to become a city, a seat of culture. "I never saw a place that needed more," he answered. Needmore still lacked a lot, if you were looking for a city; but at least it was accumulating the debris of civilization.

The height made my legs feel mushy. The ledge under my feet was actually a wall of old quarry blocks, erected here twenty years ago to keep the easternmost graves from slipping over the brink. Some poor souls took the dive before the wall was built. I thought about the old quarriers, working down there in the hole and glancing up one day to see a rain of bones.

The quarry at Romona, on the northern tip of the limestone country, was kept open for a century, from the 1860s until the 1960s. "What finally shut Roll-moany down," according to a farmer I met there picking up stones in a field, "was these two men who owned it died and the widows

got so old they didn't know Monday from Sunday. Then one of the widows died and the other went crazy. They had to put her away. And she wasn't hardly out the door before the relatives got to fighting over who owned the place, and next thing you know the lawyers got into it, and now there it sits, a world of good stone and nobody working it."

Somewhere in his fifties, filling his chocolate-colored t-shirt to more than capacity, the farmer was a glowering man who gave off an aroma of bitterness. The field he was standing in had just been cleared, and the bulldozer he had cleared it with, still ticking from the effort, hulked there beside him. Stumps and brush and weather-gray boards were heaped along the edges, ready for burning. A wagon hitched behind a John Deere tractor was parked within throwing distance. Every now and again as we talked he picked up a fist-sized rock from the dirt and heaved it clattering into the wagon. I had stopped to ask him about the quarry, whose derricks rose from behind a screen of trees at the back of his field. Would he mind if I went to have a look at it?

"Damn right, I'd mind. What the hell you want to see it for?" He squinted at me with eyes like disks punched from a skillet. "You want to break your legs? You want to break your neck? You want to get yourself *killed?* God *damn* it all to hell. Every time I turn around, Honey, there's somebody sneaking back there fishing or hunting or just fucking around. Son of a bitch go in there and break his neck, and the insurance will ruin you. You ever buy insurance? It's sky high, Honey, let me tell you."

From all of this I concluded that he owned the land.

"Naw, naw," he said. "This bunch out of Ohio owns it now. All they use is the gravel. You want to go look at it, you got to get their say-so."

"In Ohio?"

"Naw. They got an office in Spencer." He chucked a lump of stone at the wagon. Bang, clatter. "I'm just clearing this field for them. Get it in corn, put it to use."

I looked at the weathered boards in the burn piles. "What was here before you cleared it?"

"Bunch of them shacks the quarrymen lived in. Little bitty things you couldn't swing a cat in. Rattraps."

I winced. I had missed seeing the old cabins by a few hours. "Did you work in the quarry?" I asked.

"Hell yes I worked there. Twelve years, starting in 1948. I was just mar-

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ried, you know, and pissing vinegar for a job. A cousin told me to come out and he could get me on. Shit, I told him, they ain't got any work out there that'll hold me. And shit, Honey, inside a year I was right up at the top, and I stayed there till the quarry shut down."

"At the top? You were ledge foreman?"

"Shit, no. They didn't have sense enough to make me foreman. What I got to the top of was the derricks." It had been his job every week to oil the gears on the hoist engines and the huge black wheels, wide as truck tires, on the stiff-leg derricks. The wheels on the boom he could oil from the ground, but those on top of the mast he had to climb to, a hundred feet up a swaying steel tower. "You talk about fucking *dangerous*. You get on top and the wind's blowing. Nothing to hold on with but one hand, and that's greasier than pig fat. Nobody else but me would do it. I saw an oiler fall once. He screamed all the way down the derrick and six floors down into the quarry. When we picked him up he wasn't anything but a sack of guts."

This led the farmer into a vehement recital of other quarry deaths. "Once this old foreman was standing between two blocks on the grout pile, Honey, and the whole thing shifted, and his bottom half was squashed so thin you could just about see through it." A show of thickness, crusty palms half an inch apart. "We dug him out and drove him to the hospital in Greencastle, him moaning all the way. But he was deader than a hammer when we got there." Another time a drill-runner sat leaning against a tilted block to eat his lunch. "When it fell over, he never knew what hit him. Never drawed a breath or made a peep. Shit, Honey, I'm telling you a quarry's a damn dangerous fucking place."

For half an hour he fumed on about men electrocuted when machines cut through wires, men smashed by derrick hooks, men ground up in gears, scalded in explosions, drowned in trenches, buried under mudslides, men whose hearts burst from lifting or hammering. "They never made a nickel off that hole after all them poor sons of bitches got killed. Even without them widows taking it over and going crazy and all the lawyers fighting over it, the quarry was fucking done for." He swore randomly, cramming his sentences full of angry words. Yet even while swearing, and glaring at me with his skillet-hard eyes, he kept calling me "Honey," the way my Mississippi kinfolks used to do.

I eased him onto the subject of corn, then soil, then fish, hoping he would relent and say I could go on ahead and have a look at the quarry. But when I asked him again, he snarled, "Hell no. I won't have your blood on my head. First thing I know, Honey, you'd break your damn neck, and there'd be hell to pay with the insurance."

So I left him there in his bulldozed field picking up rocks, which he flung at the wagon with the furious determination of a relief pitcher nursing a one-run lead in the last of the ninth.

Wanting to explore Hunter Valley, a rash of quarries in the heart of the stone belt, I drove out to get a gate-key from the owner, Ed Bennett. The Bloomington bypass had carved up the valley, baring prime stone in the roadcuts and scrambling the map, and I was soon lost in a snarl of access roads. I stopped to ask directions at a rickety tarpaper hut that appeared to stay upright by leaning into the wind. Holding five cats on his lap, an old man with a face like a hatchet sat rocking on the front porch between a refrigerator and a cement mixer.

"If I was you I wouldn't have nothing to do with Ed Bennett," he told me. "Go hunt you up a polecat to talk with before you go talking with Ed Bennett."

"You know him?" I asked.

"He's my cousin. I've been knowing and hating him for eighty years. What do you want him for?"

I said the word, the open sesame for loosening lips in this country.

"Limestone?" he repeated. "I'll tell you about limestone." Then without further provocation he unraveled a yarn from his youth. Sometime in the 'twenties, when he also was in his twenties, he was driving up to Spencer one Saturday night for a dance at the Union Hall. It was about sundown, and he was all slicked up and primed for pleasure after a week's drudging in the stone mill. And what do you know but halfway there he saw a beautiful girl dressed in a white gown hitchhiking beside the road. Naturally, he picked her up, took her to the dance, and along about midnight proposed to her. She said yes. But first she had to go back home and break the news to her folks. So after the dance he drove her way out in the boondocks, let her out at her place, and promised to come get her the next day. On Sunday morning he drove back to her house. In the daylight it looked all tumbledown. He knocked, and this old fagged-out woman came to the door. He took off his cap and spoke the name of the girl he was supposed to marry. The old woman scratched her chin, thought a minute, and said, "The only place I ever come across that name is on a tombstone out back." Then she took him into the yard and showed him the grave.

"And what do you know, but that girl I waltzed and smooched with had been dead for near a hundred years!" Tying up the knot of his story, he sat rocking in the niche of shadow between the refrigerator and the cement mixer, petting his lapful of cats.

I had been told the story of the lovely hitchhiking ghost before, but never with so much melancholy as this old rambler had squeezed into it. The link with limestone was too faint to make out. I reminded him that I was looking for Ed Bennett.

"What do you want with that old polecat?" he demanded, as if I had never mentioned the name before. Then he waved me directions with ropy arms.

A quarrier for nearly seventy years, Ed Bennett lived next door to a limestone house, but his own place was frame. He met me at the door in blue work clothes, green suspenders, and beat-up leather boots freckled with red paint. He'd been out cutting grass and his left hand was bandaged from a run-in with the mower. The top of one ear was scabbed from a recent brush with a fan-belt. When he held out his good mitt for a shake, the lumps and calluses showed that he was not a man to baby his body. He had a good deal of body. His chest and belly formed an unbroken curve that resembled, in profile, the bulge of a nail keg.

Like most of the stone men, Bennett was a little suspicious about why a pointy-headed guy from the university should be so interested in limestone. He lowered himself into an overstuffed chair in his living room and eyed me up and down. There was a magnifying glass on the table beside him and a brass spittoon on the floor. From time to time during our talk he leaned over and let out a

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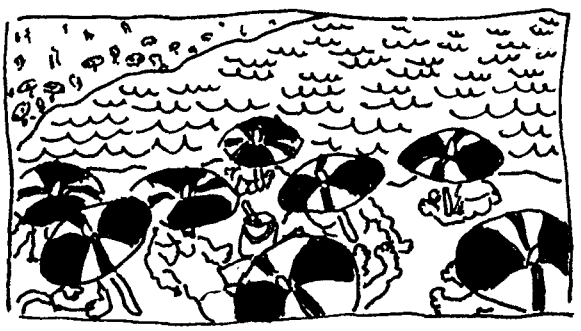
spurt of juice. He had additional reasons for being suspicious just now. In the 1970s he had permitted the dumping of some electrical capacitors in one of his quarries, and the fluids leaking from these buried gismos were poisoning the neighborhood with polychlorinated biphenyls—PCBs, recently added to the Environmental Protection Agency's hit list of deadly chemicals. In the past few months the lawyers and scientists and politicians had pestered him nearly to death.

"I never even *heard* of any PCBs until these letters started coming in the mail." He riffled a stack of envelopes on the side-table. "The print's so small you need a glass to read it. How was I to know them electrical things was poisonous? And now they're saying I tried to hide them. I pushed them around with my dozer, sure, but I wasn't trying to cover anything up. I was just smoothing the ground. If I'd wanted to *hide* them, why, in half an hour I'd have buried them so deep nobody'd *ever* find them. But these officials have got to yell about something, and right now they're yelling about a few chemicals in my quarry. If you ask me it's all a bunch of hooey."



As I asked Bennett questions about Hunter Valley, his manner became less defensive, and soon he was peppering me with stories. "The Hunter family they named the place after had a boy called Johnny. Now one time Johnny's Momma got to missing wheat out of her granary. Every day she'd look, there'd be less of it. Where'd it go? They kept watch for rats. But what it turned out to be was, Johnny'd taken him a brace and bit, bored some holes in the floor, and he was draining out the wheat and selling it. Stealing his own Momma's wheat for pocket money. That's the Hunters for you, right down to the ground.

"There was five or six company houses down by Vernia Mill. Some dagos was living there, you know, stone cutters they brought over from Italy. And in Prohibition time they made beer and sold it around. 'Blind tigers,' we called the stuff. You could drink it all night and it wouldn't make you sick. It was that good. The boys would drive their teams and wagons by and load up with that Italian beer. Twenty-five cents a quart. Anywhere you go in those quarries on a Sunday, and there'd be men sitting around with sixteen-gallon kegs and tin cups, and they'd drink till the beer ran out. Then along come Monday, and it was back to work."

A hiss of running water and a clatter of dishes sounded from the kitchen. Bennett gathered a mouthful, spat.

"There was hermits living back in them quarries all during the Depression. Still are today. They get themselves an old sheet of tin for a roof, wrap up in rugs to keep warm. Some of them are barefoot. Never talk to a living soul. The boys put food out for them, like you'd put out food for a dog, and in the winter they leave the stoves burning in the mills to keep the hermits from freezing."

The clatter of dishes rose to a crescendo and then stopped. A white-haired woman—wispy and slim, with the muted prettiness of a figurine from half a century ago—walked in from the kitchen, drying her hands on a tea towel. To Bennett she said, "Do you remember what year the Consolidated Mill burned down?"

"1921," he answered.

"Do you remember what month?"

After a moment's ponder, he said, "July or August."

She smiled, and for a moment there was nothing antique about her prettiness. "It was the last week of July, around noon. I know exactly when it was, because we'd only been married three weeks. I was cooking with Momma, and she and I went outside to look at the fire. I was just sick from thinking of you being down there in it. My uncle was working on the traveler, and my father on the planer. But all I could think about was you."

Having made her personal connection to this history we'd been gabbing about, Mrs. Bennett slipped back into the kitchen.

Talk of the Consolidated Mill reminded Bennett of a photograph I ought to see. Curled and yellow, rolled up like a scroll, it was a two-foot-long panorama shot of the Consolidated crew, taken sometime back in the 'teens. Wearing aprons, the mill workers stared out at us from beneath the visors of flat caps. He laid a mashed finger on one of the proud faces. "Just before the mill burned down that poor son of a bitch got caught in a flywheel on the belt drive. Jerked him straight up in the air and there he hung by his suspenders." When Bennett paused, leaving the mill hand dangling by those suspenders, I guessed the story might have a comic ending. But then he continued: "The top of his head was sliced clean off and his brains was spattered all over the roof. A week later the mill burned down."

"An accident?"

"No accident. But I'm not going to tell you who set the fire. The guy's son lives right down my road. If I'd name names, he'd be up here after me. That's Hunter Valley for you."

Gate-key in hand, I went to have a look at Hunter Valley. Half-Mile Hole, L-Hole, Star Hole. Among the dozens of quarries, the fetchingest by far was one named Crescent. Roughly U-shaped, steep-sided and ten feet deep in water, it might have been landscaped by a Zen gardener. On the first of May the wild cherry trees, gnarled and wind-twisted like bonsai, were in delicate white bloom along the rim and on the blocks that formed chunky islands across this miniature sea. Cedars licked upward like green torches from narrow ledges. On the bank, dogwoods in blossom spread their creamy branches and redbuds simmered with new growth like jets of purple flame.

The quarry brimmed over with birdsong and the rustle of falling water. Cliff swallows cruised above the pool, their call a steady grating sound, like that of pebbles dropping onto tin. After a few swooping runs they glided back to their mud nests on the wall, where chicks waited with open, jabbering mouths. Turkey vul-

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tures circled overhead, flattened black V's as in children's drawings. Red-tailed hawks rode the thermals. Here and there springs gushed through cracks in the wall, spreading beneath them a tongue of moss. Near the bulge of the crescent, a creek tumbling over the lip had worn a path down through six feet of clay to bedrock. Snails oozed about on errands beside the creek, leaving slick trails over stone inlaid with fossils of their three-hundred-million-year-old relatives. The black whorls of ancient mollusk shells showed up against the limestone like spiral galaxies. In mud beside the creek, the cylindrical fossils of crinoids lay jumbled with the shell casings of .22 bullets. The skull of a possum rested on the bank with its snout in the water, as if it had taken one last drink and died.

Had the possum sampled the water seeping from Bennett's Quarry, up at the north end of Hunter Valley, it might very well have died from drinking. Among all the PCB dumps in America, the quarry named after Ed Bennett was one of the dirtiest and most dangerous. A year before my first visit, technicians in bubble helmets and breathing gear and snowy protective suits, like astronauts on a hostile planet, had poked around, hauled away a few truckloads of leaking capacitors, filled the hole with fresh dirt, capped it with plastic, fenced it off, planted it with grass, and declared the three acre site "stable."

The chain-link fence still gleamed in June when I drove out for a look. Topped by three strands of barbed wire, it was the same ominous barrier you will find encircling military bases and nuclear power plants. A man who'd worked on the fencing crew said that, when driving posts, they kept running into buried capacitors, kept moving the fence-line farther out, kept hitting capacitors. Eventually they got fed up and returned to the original boundary. Inside, waist-high grass bristled on the fill-dirt. In all likelihood grass and trees and the skittering insects would inherit this land forever, and the fences would never come down. I had the sense, looking in through the wire grid at this desolate patch of earth, that I was seeing the future. A derelict railroad spur ran along one boundary of the poisoned reservation. Yarrow and multiflora roses flowered between the rotting crossties, and wild strawberries were coming ripe. I was tempted, but did not taste these chancy fruits.

In quarries, the puppeteer who makes the stone dance on the cable of a derrick is called a powerman. He sits in a shack of corrugated steel, pulling levers that resemble the emergency brakes on old trucks. In front of him there is a nest of gears, like a microscope's view of the works of a watch. Most of the time he can't actually see the stone he's lifting. Instead, he's guided by hand signals from a man who stands on the rim of the quarry. A touch on the helmet means raise the boom; palm out like a policeman—stop; wrist bent down—lower cable; twirling of wrist—rotate mast; palms pressed together—raise boom and lower cable. And so on through a brief lexicon. It's a simple speech, and an exact one. A misunderstanding could ruin a block worth thousands of dollars, a slip of the hand or eye could kill a man.

"If you're looking for an old powerman," I was told repeatedly, "drive out Mt. Carmel Road and see Cedric Walden."

Unsure how far out Mt. Carmel Road to drive, I stopped to ask directions from a boy who stood as if posing for a postcard beside a mailbox, a wand of timothy grass projecting from the gap between his front teeth. "Mr. Walden? Yessir," the boy said, pointing, "he lives right up over that next hill in a little old bitty house, and he's got a horse and a tractor and a motorcycle and a truck and I don't know how many dogs."

The horse, a frisky palomino, snorted and stamped in a muddy lot beside the house. The motorcycle was out of sight, but a vintage tractor and pickup sat in the gravel drive, their color a compromise between red paint and rust. A well-clawed dog cage filled the back of the truck. The house was little bitty, all right, a one-room box of peeling clapboard, with horseshoes nailed over the front door.

Cedric greeted me there under the horseshoes, a mug of coffee in his hand and a grin on his face. "Limestone?" he said. "You better come on along inside. I don't know a whole lot about many things, but I guess I know as much as anybody about getting stone out of the ground."

The room held an iron bed covered with a checkerboard quilt, a television, a vacuum cleaner, two heaped bureaus, two straight-backed chairs, and a wood stove. Because the April morning was chilly, Cedric had allowed himself the luxury of a fire. An open tool box, gleaming with wrenches, rested on the floor beside the bed, and beneath the bed were two scuffed helmets, one for the motorcycle, the other a miner's hat with lamp. "That's for hunting coons at night. You just switch on that light and then you got both hands free for your gun." The guns, three of them, leaned in a corner behind the door. Aside from the Bible, the volumes lined up on the bent-wire TV stand were all *Readers' Digest Condensed Books*. In the hazy windows on the south wall were two coon-dog trophies. We heard the dogs out back, their voices throaty and melancholy like a nightclub singer's. "Two blue ticks and a black-and-tan. One of them's still a pup, and another one's no account. But the third one's got a real good nose." The room smelled of pipe tobacco and bachelorhood.

Toothless, lips drawn in as if his mouth were the socket for a third eye, a week's white stubble along his jaw, his face more lined than a roadmap, his body stiff and worn down to a frazzle, Cedric had lived his seventy-one years pretty hard. But he still burned with the high spirits and gumption of a young man. He had bought the motorcycle six years earlier to use for visiting a ladyfriend in Cleveland. "That's ten hours away, and you got to go through cities to get there. Indianapolis. Columbus. I'd never been on my cycle anyplace bigger than Spencer, so I rode down to Bloomington for a practice, and I was near scared out of my wits by all the traffic. People just drove any old ways. Whizz! But I put my head down and kept riding, and soon I got over it, and I made it to Cleveland all right. I liked it so well I did it five times, and went to Florida, too, and on out to California. Only trouble I ever had was I come all the way back from Denver once and had a flat tire three miles from home."

He sat on edge of the bed, his

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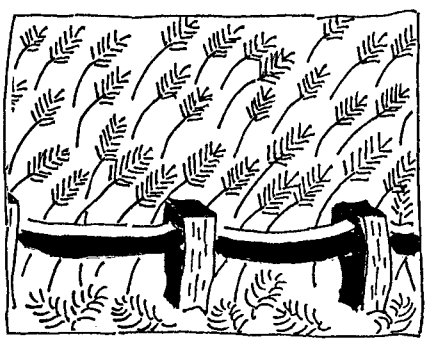
back as straight as the iron headboard, slicing the air with his left hand as he talked. The right hand, clasping an unlit pipe, lacked an index finger. "A Model-T Ford fell off a jack and cut it clean off." He wore ankle-high boots, unlaced over sockless feet, bib overalls, a faded cotton shirt, and a baseball cap with a picture of a Piper Cub and the inscription: WALDEN'S FLYING SERVICE, HASTINGS, FLORIDA. "My brothers are crop-dusters down there. They made it real good." Cedric's father and grandfathers had worked in the quarries, but his brothers and sisters left the stone belt, and so did four of his five children. One son kept the Walden limestone tradition alive by working in a mill near Bedford.

At fifteen, on the brink of the Depression, Cedric earned his first paycheck at a furniture factory. "Sixteen cents an hour. I thought I'd hit the big money." Even then he wanted to work with stone. But from 1932 until about 1946 there wasn't enough business in the quarries to keep even the veterans busy, and there were no places for new men. When building picked up again after World War II he went to quarrying, and he kept at it for over thirty years, until his retirement in 1978. "I did everything there was to do. Run the channeler, drilled, hooked, stacked. What I did best and longest was run power. It's all done by signs, you know." With hands criss-crossed by scars he ran through the gestures swiftly, like a third-base coach giving signs to a batter. "When you're running power, you can't have a thing else in your mind. You can't go thinking about fishing or women or food. You got to keep your eyes and ears open. The power's got a sound to it. All the wheels and cables, the engine, everything together makes a sound. You get to know how it ought to be, and you can tell pretty quick if it ain't right. Every morning before I started up I'd check over the works. Once I missed seeing a crack in a wheel, and by and by it busted, come a-loose and drove me right back out of the powerhouse. Broke my collarbone and laid open my head."

Another time, when he was working down in the pit, "One of the derrick hooks tore loose from a block and come at me like a bullet. Couldn't duck, couldn't run. Just stood there with my hands up and had that hook beat me on the head. I laid out a week or two after that. When I went back I told the foreman I didn't want to go hooking for a while. I didn't have the nerve to keep near the stone just yet. And if you ain't got your nerve around stone, you ain't much good for nothing."

Now and again government officials would come to advise the quarryworkers about safety. "Half of them never been in a quarry before. They looked at my powerhouse and said, You got to cover up all them gears with boards. Boards! Cover them up! When all that keeps you alive is watching that power work and listening to the sound it makes. Why, cover it up, and you're as good as dead. Some of the owners I've worked for don't know much better than the government inspectors. They're smart, all right, and know how to keep the books. But when they come to sticking their nose in a quarry most of them are lost sheep."

Over the years he had worked in nearly all the quarries in the district. "If things didn't suit me one place, I'd move on to the next. You had to work five years straight for one outfit before you'd get a two-week vacation. There for a long while I never could stay put anywhere long enough



to earn me a vacation. I'd get mad and quit and take my lunch bucket someplace else. There's been more than once I've quit one place at eight and been hired on another place by nine o'clock, and my lunch already packed. Anybody'd hire me, because they knew I was good."

Moving about, he once drove down to see how he would like digging limestone in Texas. He didn't like it much. "That stone they've got is so soft, it's about like chalk, and the place where you've got to live if you work in the quarry is right smack dab in the middle of nowhere." After a week of Texas he headed back to Indiana.

On the side he farmed a little—some corn, some alfalfa. "You work a day in the quarry, and you ain't got much juice left to do anything else." In winter, after quarrying finished for the year, sometimes Cedric stayed on to help load blocks out of the stack. But usually he went home and collected unemployment checks. "Most of the boys in the quarry feel the same as me. I like working outside, and I like having my winters to loaf."

His favorite manner of loafing was to chase raccoons through the woods all night behind a brace of good dogs. "When my legs give out and I got to where I couldn't hardly *go* anymore, that's when I bought my horse. Her name's Lady, and ain't she a beauty? I figured I could ride through the woods if I couldn't walk. But them boys I'd go with went chasing coons through places in the pitch dark where I wouldn't go at noonday. *Wild* places. I got to thinking, 'What happens if I fall off away back in there and can't get back on? *Then* what kind of a fix will I be in?' So horse-riding didn't pan out, and I quit hunting. Burned me up. I got one good dog left, but another man runs him."

In winter now, unable to chase raccoons, he watched Indiana University basketball games on television. "I get so worked up, I can't hardly stand it. If you was to see me you'd think I was crazy, the way I carry on, out here all by myself hooting and hollering over a ball game." And in winter he fed the birds. Robins had nested this spring in the toolbox beneath his tractor seat, so he let the tractor sit. When a gust of wind tipped over the nest, he picked up the eggs and replaced them. He was afraid the mother would reject them; but she didn't. And now she would take bread almost straight from his hand. "But she don't give it to the chicks until she's carried it off somewhere in the woods and sniffed it over, to make sure it's all right."

Out front again, he pointed at the huge ash tree next to his drive. "That old boy don't have long to live. It's been struck by lightning three times." Would he cut it down for firewood? "Not me. Nowadays I buy my wood. I can't run a saw, can't hunt, can't hardly get on a horse. Ain't worth a nickel." He cocked a rheumy eye at me to see if I would contradict him. Despite the toothless mouth and the bristle of whiskers and the bib overalls, there was about him the dignified air of a judge. He knew his worth, and didn't need any stranger appraising it for him.

—Scott Russell Sanders

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Growing Up White

Only when I shut my eyes tight, shut out every sensation around me, do I even begin to feel Christopher Burns land on my back after his running leap. Then I try to feel the playground gravel through the knees of my pants, and I hear Christopher's gleeful throaty laugh. Whenever I pull something of East Orange out of myself, I know I am imagining the past from scratch, telling the story another child told me, a child I once knew fairly well but never liked. I know, from a distance, that I was one of the only white kids left, a white sheep. I know that one day in April 1968 I wandered out onto the playground among the other fifth graders. *Hey white boy! You all lost the riots!* Suddenly he was on my shoulders and I was kneeling on the playground.

Newark had boiled over into riots the summer before. Newark was only twenty blocks down Central Avenue, past Nassau School, East Orange General Hospital, the Parkway and the Green Stamps outlet, where the road got narrower and there were no trees. The riots seemed very far away, but I had seen pictures of bleeding black people and I had read about the gutted houses and the broken plate glass windows of appliance stores. And when I looked up from the newspaper, I could see East Orange changing from an integrated, declining suburb into a city where the colored people now called themselves black and walked down Central Avenue with an energy and forthrightness that made me uneasy and envious. The candy store run by that Jewish family was owned by blacks now, who seemed to hesitate for a second when they handed me change from my Superman comic book. My parents' friends were talking about moving to the other side of Orange Mountain. In the fall of 1967 Jimmy Stein was the only other white boy in my class.

I read everything I could about the riots. I read anything I could find about anything, past or present, fact or fiction. In early 1968 Nixon was whipping Romney in the newspapers, Little Nell was dying, the Sea Wolf had a brain tumor, McCarthy was thrashing Johnson, slaveowners with guns pursued Huck and Jim down the Mississippi, and we were fighting on the side of the North Vietnamese—no, the South Vietnamese—against the Reds. Everyone was taking sides. And one day in April 1968, right after the death of Martin Luther King, Christopher Burns leaped on my back and then later told me over the tempera paints that from now on if I didn't pay him a quarter every morning he would beat me up every afternoon.

On my way home from school I saw fewer and fewer white faces. Only the old ladies were staying behind, the ones who lived on the Munn Avenue ridge and were too old or poor to leave, walking among the ruins of their old East Orange with their pocketbooks tucked tightly against their chests, their faces full of stoical fear. Their Munn Avenue apartment buildings rose like the Berlin Wall beside the long gray trench containing the Garden State Parkway. For me the Parkway was the DMZ, the psychic border between East Orange and Newark, separating the known and manageable from the unknown and unmanageable, a road from one place to another—and neither place East Orange. Further down Central Avenue, past the hospital and the gorge of the Parkway, were grittier houses and apartments with windows blinded by plywood. On our side of the Parkway the houses—all of them built elaborately and close together in the nineteen-twenties or before, with gothic windows and intricate two-story porches—appeared delicate, afraid and frail, like those old ladies. Black people lived in those houses now, on our side. On our side . . . what did *our side* mean?

My mother and father were not old, like the Munn Avenue ladies. I never saw anything like fear on their faces. What I saw was bewilderment, because for them as much as for the old ladies their town had irretrievably changed. My father, an Episcopal minister, had come from a small town in western Pennsylvania in 1953 to serve St. Agnes', a small parish that survived quite nicely through the nineteen-fifties with a membership weighted more and more with the elderly. The church was built in 1925, and by my time it was covered with ivy so thick I could crawl in among vines wider than my wrists and hide myself so completely I barely heard the traffic from Central Avenue. When I was about nine, a liberal and practical-minded parishioner, Tom Marx, decided that the tension of the ivy was ruining the building's foundation. Much to my father's mute dismay, he clipped the roots, waited until the vines turned brown, and pulled off layer after layer from the walls and windows—revealing a very small brick church with yellow stained-glass windows and a peaked slate roof, pieces of which would slide to the sidewalk and shatter after a hard rain.

My mother's parents had been married in St. Agnes', in its very first service, before the ivy was planted and the electric lights installed. My mother had lived in East Orange all her life. Her grandparents had moved there at the turn of the century when the town was a suburb of new frame houses, floor-through apartments and tree-lined streets, conveniently close to Newark and New York, where her grandfather imported wine. After his death in 1919, my great-grandmother lived in an elegant flat on Prospect Street where, my mother told me wistfully, the ceilings were astonishingly high and the maid had to stand on the top rung of the ladder to wash the tops of the windows. My great-grandmother had a sterling silver tea service we still used. She was chauffeured around town in a 1922 Cadillac. But then came the Depression: no more tall windows, no more maid, Cadillac or chauffeur. My mother grew up gracefully poor in East Orange, surrounded by her dead grandmother's sterling and the stiff monogrammed linens I would finger at Christmas and Easter.

By the beginning of 1967, when my father decided to build a new parish hall, most of his original congregation had died off or moved away to Short Hills or Livingston, on the other side of the mountain. If they lingered in East Orange long enough

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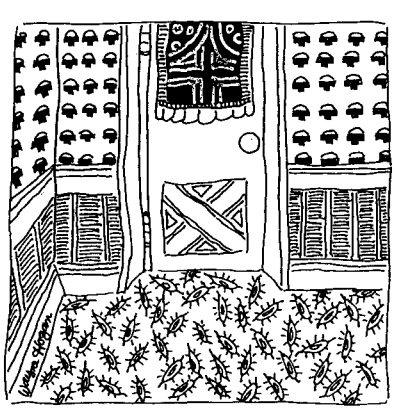
to die in the hospital next door to us, my father buried them in Rosedale Cemetery. After the service he watched their grown children drive back to Short Hills or Peapack—somewhere west of us. The dead or departed were replaced by smaller numbers of blacks. Blacks are not by nature Episcopalians. The ones in our congregation often spoke with the melody of the Caribbean, and sometimes we could barely understand the words they made with their operatic voices. Most of the whites left as soon as the blacks began attending services, while others hung on out of inertia, love for my father's doggedly high-church ritual, or affection for him personally. Some—like Miss Fenton, who worked at the library and tended her ninety-year-old aunt—greeted the blacks with patrician courtesy. My parents were puzzled. They tried to pretend nothing was different, that the blacks were white. They admitted Mrs. Miles, the Lawsons and the Shepards into the parish with open, trembling arms.

But things had changed. Even I could see that, and my memory wasn't as long as theirs. More and more I heard my parents talk about the days before the Maxwells got angry and moved to Montclair, before the Chinese restaurant closed, when all the shop-girls at Muir's were elegant old matrons, when Central Avenue still had trees, and the days when Sunday School was so large that classes had to meet outside on the lawn. They got angry at the hospital encroaching on us from next door, building new bathrooms up its facade—columns of ugly white panels that looked like refrigerator doors. They hated the ambulance sirens and the soot that collected in my father's newly replanted ivy. No time in the present could be better than those evenings with old Mr. Hall, who looked like Franklin Roosevelt and left us a chair with wingback shoulders. No parish picnic I attended could be as tasty as those Episcopal events with other vanished benefactors who had been so kind and colorful in the years before I was born. Did my parents know exactly what Sunday it was when the collection didn't cover the day's expenses? What day was it when it first seemed too many people had died?



Christopher Burns seemed happy in East Orange. He liked school and was a good student. Sometimes, especially back in the fall of 1967, he was even casually friendly to me, before I made whatever mistake I made, or before the increasingly powerful memories of the riots put us on different sides. The blacks, for whom East Orange was a middle-class frontier, were generally kind and openhearted to my family, but from the start we spoke different languages. One Sunday night in the winter of 1968 my parents and I were invited to dinner at the Lawsons' house. The Lawsons were one of those big black families who had for some reason decided St. Agnes' suited them. Their tall ramshackle house smelled of cabbage. Grandmother Lawson sat in matriarchal splendor in a chair covered with quilts, next to the player piano she had bought—she told us—at an auction of some white family's possessions. One by one that night, the rest of her family wandered in—old women, young women, children of all ages and shades, middle-aged men and young men with swaggers and new mustaches—all of whom looked with respect toward us and visible love at their mother or grandmother or aunt, who sat among her quilts listening to that player piano. All through dinner I could see the puzzlement darting over my father's face. How were all these people related ? Who was a Lawson, who was an in-law, who was a neighbor? Everyone seemed to assume we knew. I wondered if Christopher Burns' family was like this. Did his mother have a last name different from his, the way Marcia Lawson's mother appeared to? Did Christopher eat chicken cooked this way, with fried potatoes and whatever that green vegetable was? At the end of the evening, the old grandmother rose out of her chair and, letting the quilts fall, bent and kissed me on my left cheek. When I shut my eyes I can still feel her dark lips, and I can see this old queen of a woman straightening up with a hurt look freshly in her eyes as a ten-year-old white boy, thin and scared, rubs her touch away.

Because the black families like the Lawsons were larger than the white families leaving, Nassau School was so crowded that the third grade met in corners of the auditorium, the fourth grade met in the home economics and shop rooms, and the kindergarten gathered in temporary green aluminum buildings out on the front lawn. Soon I would be the only white kid in Mrs. Nichols' class; Jimmy Stein's family would move out to Livingston, a town I knew had split-level houses and lawns cut neat as carpets. I liked Mrs. Nichols. She was black, benevolent, aggressive—and she seemed to like me back. But even when she smiled at me when I wrote a rhyming poem about Gulliver or asked about the Tet Offensive, I sensed she wasn't sure where I had come from or exactly what I was doing in her classroom. The halls of Nassau School, their vaulted ceilings chipped and crumbling, were lined with bulletin boards Mrs. Nichols and others had decorated in honor of the Underground Railroad or in memory of Crispus Attucks. The kids were proud of their riots. Mrs. Nichols would tell theatrical stories about white masters who used to kill their slaves—"just line them up and shoot them down, without asking anyone, and no one would care." We studied Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy, we heard Mahalia Jackson and Billie Holiday, we read about Booker T. Washington and Malcolm X. And I was a child standing in the playground, the one white link in a chain of black faces, all of us with arms crossed and holding hands, singing "We Shall Overcome" the morning after Martin Luther King was shot.

Christopher Burns held my hand that day. He squeezed very tightly and there was a hard look in his brown eyes that I couldn't translate. Chris was bigger than I was—broad, twelve, street-smart already, with a swinging, confident walk. Three days later, he jumped me on the playground. That afternoon in art class, he asked for money. If he wanted a quarter every day, well, that sounded logical. After all, Chris and his family were poorer than I was, for certain, and my father always gave money to

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poor people when they knocked on the Rectory door. That happened all the time—old white men with bad breath who needed change for the bus to Jersey City where, they said, a job was waiting, or a wife. So I went home and asked for quarters.

"For what?" my father asked.

"Just need the money."

"For those Superman comics?"

"No."

"For a field trip?"

"Uh—no."

Within a minute I was telling the truth. And my father, sitting in our darkened dining room after dinner, frustrated for reasons of his own, lashed into me: I should not let myself be blackmailed; I should stand up to these kids and not give in all the time. Christopher Burns—tell Christopher Burns that Christopher means Christ-bearer. He is wrong to do this, and it's your responsibility to make sure he doesn't get away with doing something wrong.

I went to school with a quarter, one that I had saved. I left it on a corner of Chris' desk. When I looked over five minutes after class began, it was gone. I did the same thing for the next four mornings. Chris never said a word. He disappeared every afternoon right after school let out. But since I never needed money of my own, not much anyway, I soon ran out of change. The next week when the quarters stopped appearing on Chris' desk, he didn't seem to notice. When would he decide to care? What afternoon would he give chase?

Every afternoon I ran home fast. I felt ashamed. Not ashamed that I had given in to Chris, not ashamed I ran, but a vaguer, more nervous feeling I had felt for the first time in August 1966, when I was riding my bicycle down Arlington Avenue and a seventh-grader I knew only as Peanut Head stepped out of the bushes, punched me in the face, pushed me in the briars, and tore down Arlington Avenue on my Stingray. I never knew a bike could go so fast. Peanut Head and Christopher made me feel like an unwilling actor in a vivid guerrilla theater—that what was wrong in the world was not the world's fault but entirely mine. I wore my guilt as surely as I wore my own face. It was a guilt that I now suspect helped to paralyze blacks for centuries and now, in the spring of 1968 with Christoper Burns, it paralyzed me.

If who I was caused such a problem, then I wouldn't be me. It was more fun to be Douglas Masters—the dirtyrich millionaire I invented who had a car he could sleep in or use as a boat—than it was to be David. At the age when most children stop buying Superman comic books and abandon their fantasy lives, mine escalated. I remember the details of my fantasies—the tree that was Douglas's garage, the stoop I leaped in a single bound—better than I remember Christopher's face, our Sunday talks at home, or what it was like to sit in the lowest limb of our maple and watch the medics wheel the emergency cases into the hospital next door.

Students were starting to riot—I saw that on television. Bobby Kennedy was running for President—he was a hero more real than Abraham Lincoln. The Sundays that spring I served as acolyte I looked out to the nave during those sonorous English hymns and counted only about fifteen faces. We thought more about leaving—but we had been comfortable in East Orange for so long. Where would we go? What would it be like? It looked safer to sit still. Outside the dining room window we saw the rubble of the old parish hall—bits of stained glass shining dully in the dirt—lying in the foundations of the unfinished new building. My father was trying to raise money to complete it. For over a year we breathed dust, and I was Douglas Masters.

By late April 1968, a few weeks after President Johnson said he wouldn't run again, I wouldn't go to school.

I couldn't see very well, I told my father and mother. I couldn't lift my right arm, so even if I did go to school I couldn't write anything down. I wouldn't be in the class play about energy—Mrs. Nichols had for some reason cast me as the father, with Jimmy Stein as the son and the whitest-looking black girl, Angela Something, as the mother. I didn't want to be the father. I didn't care very much. Douglas Masters didn't live in East Orange; Douglas Masters lived in Maine, near the ocean, and besides my car I now had a speedboat that could outrace the ships of criminals. Once a smuggler shot me while I was at a party, but the bullet was deflected by my saint's medallion. I wasn't even grazed.

Up treacherously winding roads, ten miles beyond the top of Orange Mountain, lay Newark Academy, which in 1964 had left Newark for Livingston and now sat in colonial splendor on a hill complete with sixty-four acres of football fields, baseball diamonds and tennis courts. My father drove me up there in his battered Volkswagen camper. The headmaster shook his head in disbelief when he discovered I hadn't yet learned fractions, but he admitted me. Relieved, I guess, that for now they didn't have to surrender the city they'd lived in so long, my parents took out a two-thousand dollar loan to pay the tuition. If I went back to Nassau, my parents would let me leave before the school year ended; I would spend the summer commuting to Livingston, learning fractions, decimals and percents.

Newark Academy was as astonishingly white and clean as a hospital. One wing housed an auditorium with red velvet seats, the other wing a gymnasium so tall it echoed. The classrooms lay nestled behind the wings, down long brick-

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lined corridors where the linoleum under my shoes was so shiny I saw a blurry version of my face. The books were new and shiny also; to this day whenever I smell fresh printers' ink I am thrust back to Newark Academy. Douglas Masters would have liked it there. Christopher Burns would have been scared. I would be entering a world as extreme, in its way as theatrical and extravagant, as the one I would go home to sleep in every night. Here, all the boys wore braces whether they needed them or not. They all had names like Kaplan or Watson. When I visited Newark Academy, I saw their older brothers pick them up after school in two-seater sports cars. Almost all of the boys were some shade of white.

I haven't gone back to visit Newark Academy. I suspect it exists only in my imagination, gleaming and bleak, like Oz. But I did go back recently to look at Nassau School and St. Agnes' Church, which is now a diocesan mission, not a parish, serving primarily black residents. Someone has hung a round commercial thermometer on the stained glass over the church's front door, the ivy has once again been stripped, and the Rectory has been leased to the hospital. Three years after I left Nassau, St. Agnes' could no longer pay a full-time rector, so we finally moved away, to a small town fifteen miles north of East Orange. For years we would skirt the old city as we drove down the Parkway, afraid, I think, that if we looked in the wrong direction we would re-enter that drama, that changing city where we would never could quite accept change. When I take the longest view I can manage, I see I was a photographic negative, performing the role of the typical black child in a white world. There may be some impersonal poetic justice in that, but the scenes and the bits of dialogue I allow myself to remember do not assemble themselves into black and white facts. On that playground, on the last day I had to go to fifth grade, I told Mrs. Nichols I already had math to study for summer school. Looking up at her, I saw the faint hairs of her mustache glint damply in the sun, and the corners of her eyes were wet and red with tears. I had told another lie. She smiled sadly, took a breath, and said I could go home early. I ran home fast; I didn't see Christopher Burns. On the previous night Robert Kennedy had died.

—David Groff

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Stein on Soul: Lost Lecture in America

(Note: The following lecture was delivered at the Aspen Writers' Conference. In 1984 Gertrude Stein would have been 110 years old. I composed the lecture in homage, as though she were still alive.—M.K.)

"One cannot come back too often to the question what is knowledge, and to the answer knowledge is what one knows."[1] Knowledge is the thing you know, the thing you yourself have come to know. What you do not know you do not know and what you do not know you cannot pretend to know. That is what makes knowledge so interesting.

It is a thing you know and a thing you have been coming to know yourself.

It is as interesting as anything can be in the Twentieth Century and it is interesting because you do it. No one else comes to know it for you, that would not be interesting. A thing is only really completely interesting when you come to know it yourself.

Of course it is possible that anything you know may come to be known by others too but that does not directly concern you. What concerns you is your coming to know anything yourself.

One thing I discovered when I was a child is that one very exciting thing that can happen to you is coming to know. And that is why voice in literature is so interesting to the writer and to those who read.

You will see what I mean.

Now what is voice. What is voice in literature. There are several things to say about this and the first thing is this: voice is the speech of a soul.

Soul is the word I like to use for a person. It is an old and an old fashioned word and I still like the word because for me it does not really have religious connotations. My feeling about it is that it is a completely satisfactory and full bodied word that holds inside it the person science has tried to break apart in order to see more clearly. Science has generated a lot of words for parts such as psyche and ego and superego and id and then science has tried to put the parts back together with words such as physiological state and neurochemical response and neuropsychological chemistry and so on. But when I think about the universe I do not find these words very satisfactory. These words do not make me feel good or even better. So I simply don't use them. I like the word soul because in it all of a person, awake and asleep, rational and dreaming, is one. The old fashioned, colloquial use of it, as in the expression "what a lonely soul he is!" is to my mind a good one. It refers to the whole shebang. The word soul doesn't even split the person in two, as in body and soul, which is what the religious use of the word does. And as I think of it it also includes the heart, as in the expression heart and soul. And the word suggests by its very sound that we are quite a lot more interesting as we are than as laboratory specimens.

Those are all the reasons why I like this word so much. Some of you may prefer to use the word personality, but I myself do not like this word much. So when I say voice is the speech of a soul you know what I mean. The voice of the soul has no conscience, the voice of the soul doesn't censor its speech and so you know intimately everything.

Now I want to add something to this and say that voice is the speech of a soul now, one single soul now.

> The business of art as I tried to explain in COMPOSITION AS EXPLANATION is to live in the actual present, that is the complete actual present and so to completely express that complete actual present.
>
> One thing which came to me is that the Twentieth Century gives of itself a feeling of movement, and has in its way no feeling for events. To the Twentieth Century events are not important. You must know that. Events are not exciting. Events have lost their interest for people. You read them more like soothing syrup, and if you listen over the radio or television you don't get very excited. The thing has got to this place, that events are so wonderful that they are not exciting. Now you have to remember that the business of an artist is to be exciting. . . . I was struck with it during the War: the average dough-boy standing on a street corner doing nothing—(they say, at the end of their doing nothing, "I guess I'll go home")—was much more exciting to people than when the soldiers went over the top. The populace was passionately interested in their standing on the street corners. . . . And it is a perfectly natural thing. Events had got so continuous that the fact that events were taking place no longer stimulated anybody. . . . It is quite characteristic that in The Making of Americans, Proust, Ulysses, nothing much happens. People are interested in existence. Newspapers excite people very little.[2]

People are interested in existence, in the daily life. By this I do not mean description, though description may sometimes enter into it. Description, if it is journalism, is not what I mean. The exciting thing, one very exciting thing is getting the news from somebody, the very distinctive way a soul tells you its news. That, the telling, is what makes it news.

You don't want the news in the form of a list or a printout, you want it in a human voice, you want to get it straight from the soul's mouth and nowhere else.

Especially in the Twentieth Century people want to know what is going on with anybody right now. And it can really be anybody, anybody at all.

For instance it can be Alva:

> "My sister, Dorothy, . . . goes to all gala affairs downtown. She has invited me to go and raise the dickens with her but I won't go. She's the merriest one in her group and separated from her husband. They take her all the places with them. She can eat dinner in a restaurant every night if she wants to. She's crazy about fried fish and all kinds of things. . . . (But I say) we each have only one single life which is our real life, starting at the cradle and ending at the grave. I warn Dorothy every time I see her that if she doesn't watch out her life is going to be left

[1]Gertrude Stein, *Gertrude Stein Lectures in America* (Vintage Books, 1975), p. 11.

[2]Robert Bartlett Haas, ed., *How Writing Is Written* (Black Sparrow Press, 1974), pp. 157-58.

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aching and starving on the side of the road and she's going to get to her grave without it. The farther a man follows the rainbow the harder it is for him to get back to the life which he left starving like an old dog. . . . I told Dorothy that life was not a tree with a million different blossoms on it. . . . She has a box she puts pennies and nickels in when she thinks she's running around too much and she uses the money in the box to buy candles with for church. But that's all she'll do for her spirit, which is not enough for a grown woman."[3]

Or it can be the psychopathic killer in Jayne Anne Phillips' story "Gemcrack."

She is sitting in the car and I do my number. Looking down the sight I see an aureole flare to the right and left, all around in haloed flutters. Then it wavers like underwater noons. I have to split, my Uncle doesn't wait. He says be back, be quick, be reverent. We pray for these great states, for the Great State of the City of New York. We make em break em cart em away, Zing! like a silver cat scratch burning way down where you recognize your name. I make a sound: the letter S, snakes leaving skin to sun. Her head sinks down; I hear the sound and right away I'm fluttering. Gem-stepping down the alley I turn, squeeze off a quick shot and the girl half dazed on sidewalk falls over, lays down like she's home. And I'm running, rolling round like the eyes of Jesse James. Love is the outlaw's duty.[4]

It is very strange, isn't it, this voice. You will never hear a killer say anything like this. Killers, if they talk at all, do not talk like this. You will never hear one say "Love is the outlaw's duty." But Jayne Anne Phillips has heard the voice of this killer's soul. And so when you read her story you get to hear his soul speak and this is an experience you will never have in conversation.

Alva's voice is closer to what you might actually hear in a conversation, though not quite. This is another interesting thing about voice in literature, that though it allows a lot of range, it is never what you would hear in conversation, even very intimate conversation. Voices are public or private in varying degrees. Alva's voice is much closer to a public voice than the killer's. The killer's voice is so private you hold your breath because you can scarcely believe you are actually hearing this.

Now I myself think it is a mistake to assume that the more public voice is more interesting. Many publishers now believe this because they confuse interest with accessibility and so they are putting their very considerable money on the very accessible whether it's interesting or not. But to my mind they are mistaken. The more private voice is the more interesting because then something very very secret and personal is revealed. And I believe that the people who read would buy a lot of these books. But many publishers do not agree with me. Publishers are like anybody with a lot of money at stake: they are wary of the unknown.

So: Alva's voice is more public, the killer's voice is more private, and you see now what I mean when I say voice is the speech of a soul. Voice is the speech of one single soul now, and we like to know as many people as possible.

You may have read my book USEFUL KNOWLEDGE. If you read this book you read the part where I count to one hundred by ones. It goes one and one and one and so on mercilessly until we reach one hundred. This is interesting because the immediate, the individual thing is what is interesting to people. Forty-eight is not interesting because it is a collective number and everybody in 48 looks and sounds the same. Of course this is dull but that is only part of it. The other part of it is that this is not how existence is. Existence is one and then another and then the next one and they are all very different from each other and so there is always someone to dance with.

If there is 25 or 48 or 100 you are completely alone. You can dance alone of course but it is not the same thing as dancing with somebody. When you want to dance with anybody you need a one you do not need one hundred.

One hundred is like the chorus and as you know the chorus is only a part of the stage set. The chorus is scenery. And what you want is to dance with Oedipus to dance with Antigone.

The chorus is all dressed the same.

There is another thing to say about voice and it is this: you can know a soul very quickly. Voice gives you immediately everything about the soul of that character. Even if the character has quite a long story to tell, still the first paragraph of voice immediately tells you everything.

And we like this, we don't like having to wait. We like things to go on, even after we know everything, but we don't like waiting for things to begin. We don't like long, slow, laborious beginnings. We don't like anything ponderous at all unless it's an elephant. If it's an elephant it's appropriate and then we like it, but in literature no one likes it and no one reads it and so the editor will return your manuscript.

So even if the person takes quite a long time to tell her or his story, still, if it is the voice of a soul speaking, the first few sentences begin immediately to tell you everything.

For instance, here is Billy.

Dear Daddy,

How are you? We are having a nice time. I feel fine. There is a man here called Tom Theboss that made me a sling shot and takes us swimming also, he is a lot of fun and tells a lot of jokes. And he acts more like my father than you ever do. Well how are you? I don't know why, I ask, because I don't really care because I hate you. Mom told me how you walked out on us and didn't give us any money. She says I am old enough to know the truth, now we live with Gramp who is old and mean sometimes, well you know him. Granma died last winter and I was sad for about a minute and then I was happy about it. She used to hit me on the legs and back with a belt and yell at Mom all the time about money and things like food. Also she used to give me three rotten Woolworth cookies for desert every night. All this crapp because, you left us. It is your fault. I hope Tom Theboss will marry Mom, and I Really hope so. Because I am sick of thinking about you and wishing that you would come and say Hello. You came and see me about twice in many years and I allways hoped that you would say Hello on my Birthday or Christmas but, you never did. What a

[3]Jane Bowles, *My Sister's Hand in Mine* (The Ecco Press, 1970), pp. 301-2.

[4]Jayne Anne Phillips, *Black Tickets* (Delta/Seymour Lawrence, 1979), p. 253.

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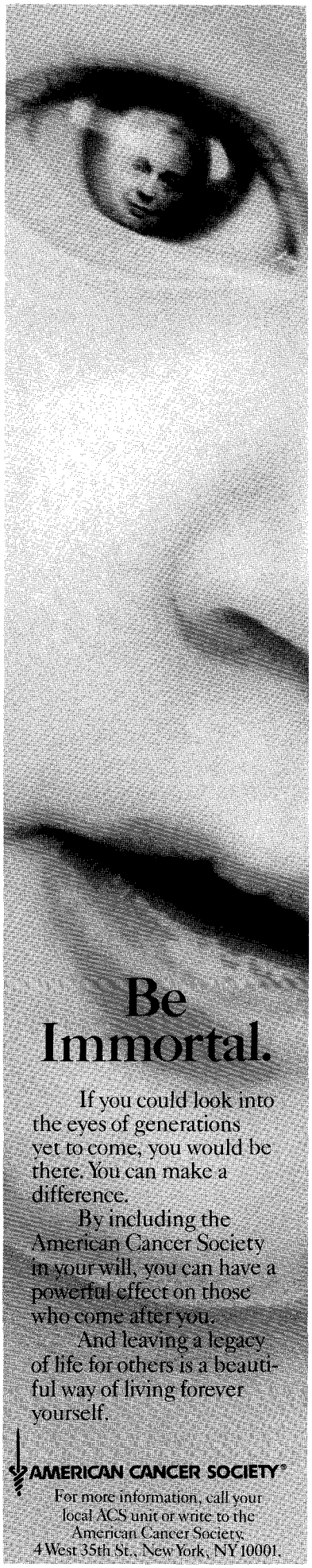
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pain you are, what a Louse. Tom can do anything. And reads books all the time, I even think Gramp likes him, anyway they play crokay together allthough Gramp allways beats him like he can beat anybody. But, Tom plays crokay pretty good, Mom said you use to play crokay but you stunk. I hope that it is real hot in the City and you are really sweating a lot and can't sleep. By the way it is Nice and Cool up here. It would serve you right anyway. Mom allways says that every dog will have his day. I guess that means we are the dog that will have their day but, as far as I am concerned you, are the Real Dog. And guess what kind of Dog I mean. Mom told me the story that you and Margie got married in some phoney way and I just wanted to ask you if Margie still had green teeth, Mom said, it was the only real Irish thing about her and, she said that she was a snake in the grass and she really is a snake. She even looks like a snake. Mom also said that you and her deserve each other. When Tom is my real Father soon I will ask him to go and punch you and Margie in your face.

Yours very truly, your Son,
Billy[5]

Now at first you think this is a letter but about three sentences into it you hear that it isn't actually a letter. You know right away you are listening to a soul. And about three sentences into it you know this soul really quite incredibly intimately. You want to go on of course because you want all the particulars one after another, but it is only these particulars you don't know now. You already know Billy very well. When he says, "Well how are you, I don't know why I ask, because I hate you" when he says this you begin immediately to know him quite intimately.

In life you may talk to someone for quite a while before you have come to have an impression of that person. In literature you know almost immediately whether you like him or not.

So you know very quickly whether or not you want to dance with this person.

And you know very quickly whether it will be waltzing or reggae or country swing or improvisation. In just a sentence or two you can know all of this.

I will give you an example from painting, something that happened to me in San Francisco when I was a child. My brother and I had gone to the museum and I saw two paintings there, two very different paintings.

> , , . One was by a man I think named Rosenthal. . . . The other painting was Millet's Man with a Hoe. Both the pictures interested me equally, but I did not want a photograph of the Rosenthal picture but I did of the Man with a Hoe. I remember looking at it a great deal. And then we that is my brother and myself very moved not knowing exactly why but very moved showed the photograph to my eldest brother and he looked at it equally solemnly and then he said very decidedly, it is a hell of a hoe, and he was right.[6]

Now voice is like that. When a writer manages to get a soul to speak, when in literature you hear a really wonderful and fantastic voice, it is like that. The voice is a hell of a hoe.

You probably know if you have read my writing that I believe in the individual. I like the very different differences between individuals. I believe this completely. You may also know that I have decided that children should have the vote too. Children are as real as anybody. The trouble with the family the reason we are all so tired of the family and the committee and the team and the department and the company is that they are all sums like one hundred or 48. Children are like anybody. They do not like to pretend that they don't exist.

They know they do exist. And the mothers know they the mothers exist and the fathers know they the fathers. And that is why everybody is so very completely weary of the family.

Nobody wants to pretend to be like someone else. And the more the population grows the more this is true: we are all interested in how the other person is different and we are all interested in how we are different from any other person and to know this you must get to know a person's soul.

Now there is another kind of speaking in literature which is not really voice. I mean the kind of speaking which approximates actual conversation. Some writers get this by using a tape recorder. Some writers get it by listening, and when the writer listens very carefully to what people are actually saying this can be somewhat

[5]Gilbert Sorrentino, *Aberration of Starlight* (Random House, 1980), pp. 18-19.

[6]Gertrude Stein, *Gertrude Stein Lectures in America* (Vintage Books, 1975), p. 65.

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interesting. When this happens we say she or he has a good ear, an ear for colloquial speech.

This is not at all the same as voice but even so it can sometimes be interesting.

For instance there is Bobby Louise Hawkins' story LIVER AND ONIONS.

Now this story is interesting because Bobby Hawkins has a good ear. And she grew up listening to women in Texas compare their methods for preparing liver and onions. And the women she was listening to were not self-conscious, they were simply in the kitchen like they always are, and so they talked to each other matter of factly. They talked like they always talk. They didn't know Bobby was listening, oh they knew she was listening but they didn't know she was listening in a special way. They didn't know she was hearing the way a writer of dialogue hears. They didn't know she was going to remember their words, exactly the way they said them, for the rest of her life.

Some people read the interviews in PLAYBOY thinking these are close to the way the person really talks. In the same way an interview on television can sometimes be somewhat interesting but only if the person talks the way she or he talks. If the person talks like they always talk then an interview on television can be somewhat close to LIVER AND ONIONS. But if this person is nervous and so talks *differently*, then it is very likely that the interview will be dull. And so they generally are.

The *information* might be interesting but the *speech* can never really be very interesting.

So that is why I like LIVER AND ONIONS. You can read the way people actually talk. This is dialogue. But it is not voice. You hear dialogue in life but you don't hear voice in life. You don't hear it because the soul is too private and too complicated, way too private and too complicated for words. Voice will not be heard at any dinner party anywhere, will not even be whispered in the most intimate of intimate conversations. That is why Kerouac is not so interesting as Isabelle Miller. And why LIVER AND ONIONS is so very different from THE WHITE HOTEL. Writers writing voice find words which approximate the voice of the soul. That is what I think about this.

Now how does voice come to a

DAVID WOJAHN

STEAM

The cloud pulled its smokey sleeve across
the mountain, where Christ in cement,
70 feet tall and throbbing
His orange airplane beacon, gestured to the Ozarks,
His benediction lost in fog.
We drank champagne on the hotel balcony,
tossed the plastic glasses down
into the ravine below, watching the Saviour's
arm move in and out of mist. I want to say
you rose from the deckchair to whisper my name,

and massage my forehead like a warm wind
dragging the evening mist behind. But already
I knew you'd turn back to our room
and in the gold leaf oval of the mirror
press your trembling head against
its steamy face. Then, as if to no one:
There are so many things
I can't understand. You faced me and I saw
the long red mark from the mirror
crosshatch your cheek. You slept, and all afternoon

I wandered cobbled alleys in the rain,
path overgrown to the mines, mineral baths abandoned
half a century, tin-roofed company shacks.
I remembered the Belgian doctor from the 1890s
and the baths he prepared here
for burn victims and lepers, who came
from throughout the world. With his white-smocked
assistants, he'd lower them with silken robes
into water that churned out
boiling from the mountain. The idea

was to burn them twice, exhaust their pain
into simple numbness. The cure, he wrote,
is admitting no cure. The echoes of their cries,
clear summer nights, could be heard by passengers
of trains far across the valley.
Those nights you'd wake, crying for
a lover who was dead, I wanted
to merge your sorrow with my own,
as if pain could modify pain
into love, or wisdom. That final night,

when you raised yourself in sleep
from the brass hotel room bed and called
someone's else's name, I felt I was lowering you
into water so hot I could only
see steam, and your cries for him,
by this time so familiar, began again.
Or was it you who lowered me,
my arms already thrashing, the mineral
steam enfolding me?
There was so much I couldn't understand.

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JAMES HEARST

NEVER TOO LATE

He grunted, jammed
his foot on the spade.
Eighty years old, he found
earth more solid than
it used to be. He sharpened
the spade, let the hose run
where he dug. His leg
trembled when he pushed
with all his might.

But he had a rose bush
to plant and come time
or tide he would have it
near the window where he
could watch it grow.
He told himself, it may be
a bit late to forgive me
my transgressions but it is
never too late to plant
a rose bush.

writer. Voice is what a writer hears, it is very simple but it is not very simple.

Voice is what a writer hears which is something quite different from what people who do not write hear. It is not what people in a conversation overhear. That is conversation, that is hearsay, that is talk. It is not literature and it is not what a writer hears when she or he is listening.

When a writer hears, she or he hears two things.

A writer hears the speech. And a writer also hears another sound, the sound of the soul inside the speech.

So you could say that a writer has double hearing. Both kinds are useful and both kinds may appear in the same story. The part of a writer's hearing that hears the speech uses this to write dialogue. The part of a writer's hearing that hears the soul uses this to write voice. "I began then to consciously listen to what anybody was saying and to what they did not say while they were saying what they were saying." I became very good at this double hearing.

So to begin with there is something you heard, a woman saying something about her son home from the swimming pool. You try saying it several times and you ask yourself, is this how I was hearing it. Because you don't want it the way it really was said, you want it the way you heard it.

You do not care at all how it was actually said by anybody.

And as often as not nothing at all was said by anybody, you were just hearing.

You listen. You hear. And then at some point you *know*: this is it.

It is at this point when you know memory doesn't come into it. Knowledge is acquired, so to speak, by memory, but when you know anything, memory doesn't come in. At any moment that you are conscious of knowing anything, memory plays no part. When any of you feels anybody else, memory doesn't come into it. And that is what happens at this point in the writer's hearing. There is that point, and you feel it very strongly where what you remember having heard, if you actually heard anything, is no longer remembered at all. Memory has dropped out of it and you are hearing something new. *Here comes my son.* And you don't care at all if anybody said anything, you are interested only in what you heard. And at this point you feel very strongly that this, this is it, this is how you heard the speech you heard.

So you see we have a whole new definition of hearing.

Which has nothing at all to do with tape recorders. And which is actually a very old kind of hearing, one of the oldest kinds there is.

So you begin to speak, that is to hear. At this point speaking is hearing. Instead of speaking in tongues you are hearing in tongues. You try out several sentences using this voice.

HERE COMES MY SON, BACK FROM THE SWIMMING POOL, SMELLING OF CHLORINE AND SHINING, SHINING LIKE A TROUT.

Then it begins to come to you very quickly. Very suddenly you know quite a lot of things about this person speaking. You know this is a woman with two children, a boy and a girl. The boy is a bit older but only a little. This is important, you know this immediately. The woman has other things, geraniums and a job at a radio station, but these things are incidental to the businss of the boy and the girl. The woman loves the boy—he can scarcely do anything wrong—but the girl gets on her nerves. It has always been so. The boy is good at a lot of things—chess and diving and bicycle racing, and his mother is teaching him tennis. He does very well and both of them are pleased as punch. The mother begins by teaching both of them but right away the boy does much better, the girl swings clumsily and misses and misses, and she is made even more irritated by her brother trying to help and throws down her racquet and sulks off into the wild rose bushes. Also she spills things and drops quite a few plates and does a lot of other loud, crashing and noisome things and all this irritates the woman. If the boy breaks a cup—but he doesn't much, or so it seems to the mother, but who has actually been counting? Still when he does break a thing the mother is not at all irritated. Instead she finds this quite all right, even interesting, as though he has invented a marvelous new activity, breaking things.

So you begin to see the situation. You begin to get this very complete picture of things from just a few sentences of the woman's voice.

I think you will agree this is a very mysterious thing, this odd kind of double hearing. At the same time when you hear this way it is quite natural and easy, when it happens it is the easiest thing in the world. You do not think much about it at the time, you don't think of yourself as mysterious or unusual but you do pay attention, very close attention to what you hear.

Everyone who is a writer has in her or his imagination many souls. Each one knows something, knows often quite a lot and wants to speak, wants to be heard. When a writer hears these voices and writes this down this writing is quite beautiful. It is beautiful even when the voice is ugly because these voices are so very much what they are and are not what they are not.

I have often thought of this writing down of a soul's voice as like a hand letting go a dove. There it flies.

—Marilyn Krysl

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Stories, by Meir Blinkin. Translated from the Yiddish by Max Rosenfeld. State University of New York.

Harmony of the World, by Charles Baxter. University of Missouri. $8.95 (paper)

Hecatombs of Lake, by Tom Ahern. Sun & Moon. $11.95

Literary Intimacy

At a recent family gathering, my nephew, a communications major at a large state university, mentioned with some pride that he did not read books. Reading, he explained, was time consuming and tedious, and since the printed word's only purposes were to communicate information or to entertain, there was nothing a page of cold print could accomplish for him that any visual medium could not accomplish better.

Well, there are Philistines behind every bush, and one is tempted to shrug an educated pair of shoulders at the poverty of such a point of view, but anyone who reads contemporary fiction may find it difficult to leave such an encounter without some lingering doubt.

Dear God, what if the kid's right?

If we assume that the writer writes to be read, preferably by a public larger than the sum of university professors sent complimentary review copies, then how far beyond Conrad's injunction to the writer to "make the reader see" must a writer go so that fiction can be more than software for the eventual creation of film? If "to entertain" means more than "to titillate," than to what extent should the aesthetic effects of fiction be accessible to a general reader? If the aesthetic effects of prose *are* accessible to a general reader, does that make the work inartistic? Is "artistic" a euphemism for "élitist," or for "obscure"?

Meir Blinkin was born in 1879, emigrated from Russia to New York City in 1904, and died in 1915. A frequent contributor to the Yiddish periodicals of the Lower East Side, his work has been collected and issued as part of a series published by the State University of New York Press. The modern reader will in all likelihood approach these stories as period pieces, artifacts of a time and place now vanished being preserved in a single volume by a large university press as a cultural service. The book indeed serves that function, though there are moments when the characters seem oddly contemporary.

In "Card Game," the longest and best story in the collection, a young wife too often neglected by her business-obsessed husband eventually finds solace in adultery. Her female companions gather at her house for a game of cards.

> It was that kind of time in this country—traces of it are still present today—a time which gave rise to a certain class of people whose life's work consisted in doing whatever their hearts desired, whenever their hearts desired it. Should any member of this class have said, for example, that it was wrong to sleep with the husband of your best friend, such a person would have been branded a coward or a small-town yokel who did not know how to get the most out of life. The more affairs and experiences you had, the better was your reputation, the greater the esteem in which you were held. . . .
>
> Claire LaFontaine lived openly with every boss who ever employed her, and she did it defiantly, thereby demonstrating her independent free spirit. If a manufacturer ever dismissed her from her job, it didn't faze her in the least. She was never out of work. She was always in demand.

Perhaps Blinkin's time is not so far away as we might first think.

These twelve naturalistic stories deal with the ordinary longings of the human heart—faith, making a living, marriage, love, lust, children, the mystery of death—and since there is no possibility of Blinkin having ever taken an M.F.A. degree at a university, we expect no straining for artfulness, no subtle craft that makes the telling of greater significance than the subject itself. Blinkin's literature celebrates human-ness, not literary style. There are passages that to our modern ear are horribly melodramatic, as when salty tears gush like fountains from eyes. And there is one story, "Incomprehensible," that turns upon a young man saying in all seriousness to a prostitute, "What *are* you doing in a place like this?" to which she replies, "What are *you* doing in a place like this?" However, a story such as "Smoke," in which a newlywed husband suggests to his wife that she have her first pregnancy aborted, has the power to move a modern reader.

Now, my nephew might prefer to see the film "Hester Street." He'd miss little but the opportunity of knowing an authentic vision of a time and place not his own and the opportunity of coming to know that time and place at a pace set by him, rather than some director. For the modern reader without a predilection for literature, Blinkin's work is not very different from film software, but for the reader who wishes to immerse himself in the sound and feel of a vanished time and place, *Stories by Meir Blinkin* is a fine read.

Charles Baxter does not write film software, though *Harmony of the World*, the sixth winner of the AWP Award Series in Short Fiction, indeed exhibits the cinematic qualities of a documentary. Nearly all ten of these stories are written in short takes, motes of prose separated from each other by blank lines where we irresistibly mentally insert CUT TO. The style fights our sense of time and space; nevertheless we are left with a kind of pure narrative that moves as rapidly as film. As readers we compulsively supply the "narrative glue" that Baxter deliberately omits, and consequently reading Baxter becomes a rich experience, one that requires us to be active participants in the fiction, rather than passive members of an audience.

Baxter entertains us by the compassion and wisdom with which he draws characters so many of us know. In "Xavier Speaking," Arthur and Carrie, who "read Fanon, Norman O. Brown, and Cleaver to each other . . . , listened to music, smoked first dope, then hash, then, sitting on the bank of the Mississippi

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River on the St. Paul side, dropped LSD," move to a farm in Wisconsin because, "Good dirt is a drug." Some years later, a Charles Manson-ish Vietnam vet, Xavier, shows up.

> "Sure, he's a psychopath," Carrie admitted.
>
> "Then why do you want to sleep with him?"
>
> She paused. "I want . . . to put my fingers on whatever is producing all that heat. I want to touch that furnace."
>
> "You'll be burned."
>
> "I'll be changed."

That lovely bit of dialogue floats alone, a discrete passage independent of description of time, place, or even notice of a facial expression. The stories proceed less by the accrual of detail than by the accrual of crucial moments, a cinematic technique that in print makes a very pleasing kind of magic. Baxter at his best, as in "Harmony of the World," "A Short Course in Nietzschean Ethics," "Weights," and "Xavier Speaking," flashes us through his characters' lives and creates stories that are engrossing and provocative. Unfortunately, some of Baxter's stories do not so much conclude as taper off. The short cinematic takes work less well in "Horace and Margaret's Fifty-second" or "The Would-be Father," because these otherwise satisfactory stories end not with action or a gesture, but with a character meditating on the perceived world. It is as though entire stories had been constructed to reach a devastating culminating image, but in fact the image is a static lifeless abstraction. Despite that evenness, *Harmony of the World* deserves a wide readership.

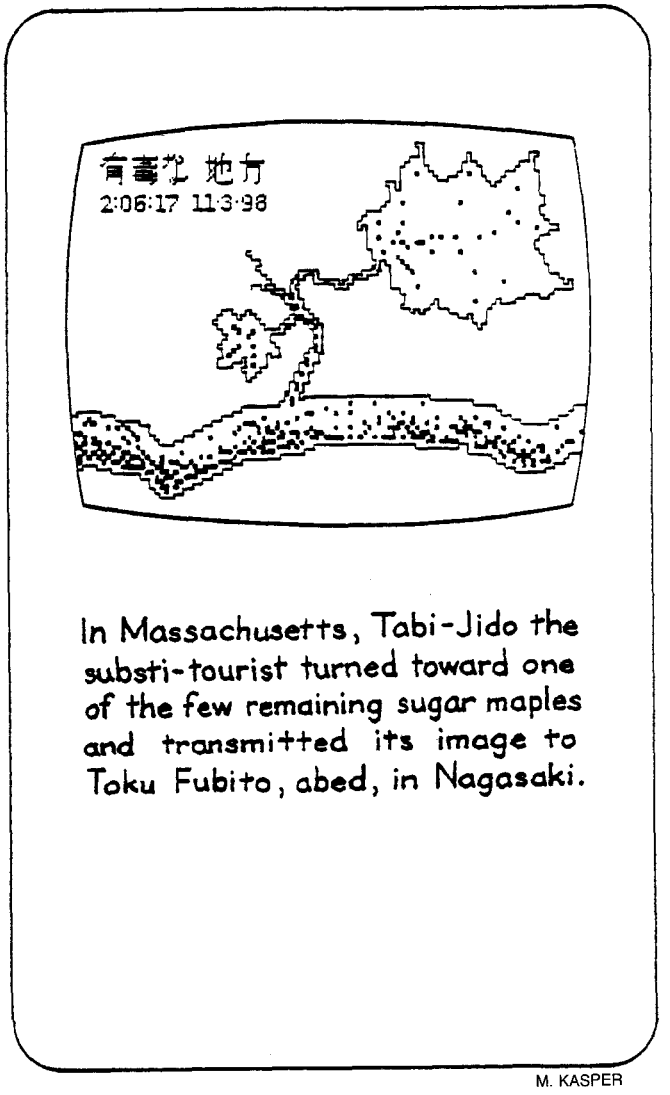
Like Charles Baxter, Tom Ahern challenges us to see his world with a non-cinematic eye. *Hecatombs of Lake* is an inconsistent collection of work that is consistently interesting. Though these stories may be set in the Budapest of 1920, Spain in 1833, the city of Rome, villages in Afghanistan, or contemporary Illinois, Ahern never troubles us with the details of landscape; rather, his subject is the interior landscape of the mind as it is filtered through the lens of a particular inner vision. The most extreme example of this is "My Summer Scenes," a story in which we are given no sense of a physical place at all, but which manages to take place in a very real realm that can only be called the summer of the writer's thirty-fifth year. Ahern writes with authority, so we never are embarrassed by the hallmark of experimental prose, the passage that is nothing more than the writer calling attention to himself:

> It happens that one day I try to wash my new shirt by hanging it out in a heavy rain. Something goes wrong. Patches of the shirt change color, and the armpits smell worse. Dirt flies up to strike it.
>
> I am weepy and swoon. The shirt is submerged in a sink of water and Woolite. The stain looks angrier, grows bigger. I pray for a miracle. God, hearing my plea, makes the color solid again.

Now, this may seem like a small thing, but how many writers would have felt compelled to tell us the color of the shirt? Ahern here chooses to ignore the simply visible in order to give us the greater vision.

Often Ahern's stories have the feel of a tale, as though we are children sitting about a fire listening to some older, slower voice among us that takes great pleasure in spinning fantastic stories for our delight. There is no cinematic equivalent to voice, and my nephew might do well to learn to hear with pleasure the sound of character in Ahern's fiction. In "Dr. Zifhart Leaves for Atlantic City," a set of pure gold dentures become animated and homicidal, flying through the air in search of the dentist's throat. In "The Anatomist *of Petrus Borel*," an impotent husband avenges his young wife's infidelities by dissecting each of her lovers, preserving them skinless, in the final case still alive, suspended in enormous vats of formaldehyde. In "Unsophar and Onsopur" (One-So-Far and One-So-Poor?), a parable about the nature of truth in writing, the career of a heretofore scrupulously honest letter-writer is ruined when his counterpart in a distant city embroiders the affections of his client and includes asides addressed only to the letter-writer himself. For each of these three stories, Ahern employs a nameless story-telling voice, a voice that at the beginning of the tales seems to have identity but by the story's end has faded to oblivion. Like children, we are mystified, drawn in, and enchanted by a seductive voice that requires only that we listen. Ahern is a wonderful seducer. In his world we are at ease, we feel adventurous, we feel challenged to emerge beyond our ordinary selves.

That is the experience of literature the non-reader never can know, the resonance of a voice that in the reader's mind becomes private, direct, individual, and intimate.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In Massachusetts, Tabi-Jido the substi-tourist turned toward one of the few remaining sugar maples and transmitted its image to Toku Fubito, abed, in Nagasaki.
M. KASPER

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Which of us who reads cannot remember a moment when we were certain that some author, perhaps long dead, positively *knew* us, our concerns, our fears, and our needs? And how we suspected that in some mystical way the writer wrote *for* us? Films, of course, speak to us, but do so usually at a communal gathering, and always with the clamor of several creative voices: actors, writers, cinematographers, directors, film editors. Charles Baxter and Tom Ahern are able to establish their intimate voices without relying on the exclusively visual, and Meir Blinkin, even with his turn-of-the-century naturalism, creates a world that is uniquely his own. The visual aspect of writing will always tell the story, but only carefully crafted language can create voice. As long as writers strive for that intimacy, there will be an audience ready to read.

—Perry Glasser

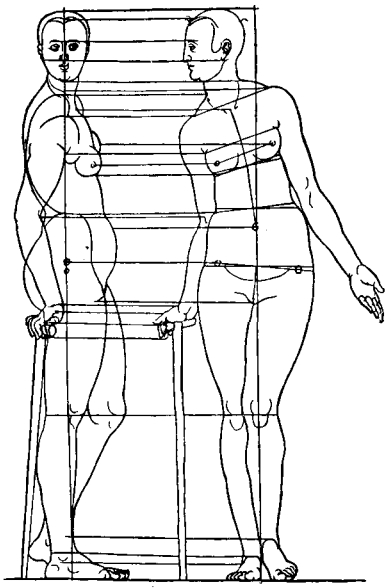
Through Rose-Colored Glass

"Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate . . ."(I Corinthians 13:12)

An acknowledged best seller in several European countries and in the U.S., recently republished in a paperback edition by Warner Books, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* is certainly meant for *rereading*, in Barthesian terms—that is for "an operation contrary to the commercial and ideological habits of our society, which would have us 'throw away' the story once it has been consumed ('devoured'), so that we can move to another story, buy another book. . . ." (*S/Z*) No single reading can exhaust the many *enigmatic* aspects of form and substance in this first novel. On the surface it is a "transparent" account of a series of dramatic events placed in a mysterious North Italian abbey in late November of 1327. The story is craftily cast in the form of a quick-paced *mystery novel*, turning to advantage Eco's theoretic knowledge in the field (see his *Role of the Reader. Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, Indiana University Press, 1979, with special chapters on the tightly-plotted, "closed" texts of Conan Doyle, Eugène Sue or Ian Fleming). But, as a reviewer (in *The New Republic*) has pointed out, the formula of the mystery novel is employed by Eco as a *trope*, a kind of *mediating form* for higher narrative ambitions and an *intertextual* "looking glass."

The observant reader will not fail to notice in the complexities of plot certain stock procedures and situations: a succession of puzzling deaths, escapes and pursuits, secret books and cryptograms, or a precipitated dénouement with apocalyptic overtones. He will even identify an appropriate variant of a standardized conflict: *private eye* (here an erudite Franciscan monk and ex-inquisitor) vs. *police detective* (the official

Why I Don't Write Like Franz Kafka



William S. Wilson

$7.50 paper

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inquisitor of the Pope). William of Baskerville is further related to the Sherlock Holmes model through his "intertextual" name and such stock phrases as "it seems elementary to me," "now many things become clear," this is a "fairly easy key," fired at a Benedictine novice and disciple in the role of Watson (called, in a jocular anagram, Adso of Melk). William illustrates many features of his type to the point of parody: he conducts his investigation with many hesitations and afterthoughts, "with long preliminary moans," "typical of the men of his country" (England), "as if starting the exposition of a completed thought cost him a great mental effort." (p. 145). He likes to demonstrate his acumen, and in a final showdown with the master criminal of the book he overwhelms Adso with the extent of his knowledge. In his turn, Adso uses his vantage point as a *narrator* often only to mediate our readers' perplexities and nourish them with his own. During his brief association with William he learns to "think with [his] own head" and venture into little explorations of the *world of signs,* though his discoveries remain accidental and basically intuitive.

The ironic-comic key in which much of the mystery plot is played out is further emphasized by the succession of *subtitles* (allegedly a later addition to Adso's "manuscript") that conceal rather than reveal the themes, in such equivocal, metanarrative comments as: "In which Adso receives the confidence of Salvatore, which cannot be summarized in a few words. . . ," "In which though the chapter is short, old Alinardo says very interesting things about the labyrinth. . . ," "In which, if it were to summarize the prodigious revelations of which it speaks, the title would have to be as long as the chapter itself," etc. Almost every *proper name,* on the other hand, participates in a sort of seriocomic intertextual game. The monks in this medieval abbey are called Adelmo of Otranto, Nicholas of Morimondo, Malachi of Hildesheim, Salvatore (a very Hugolian monster and archetypal picaro), Paul of Rimini, Magnus of Iona, or Jorge of Burgos (the blind and wicked master of the Labyrinth, a not wholly comic travesty of Borges). A host of historical personages is summoned to take part, alongside the fictitious ones, in a crucial confrontation between the "heretic" trends and the institution of Papacy; or to provide, in a kind of infinite *footnoting* (again reminding one of Borges) a network of "authorities" that nourished medieval learning and its abstruse doctrinal disputes.

Accordingly, at least two other *narrative frames* surface in this novel: the first, *religious* and *historical,* turns a crime mystery into a political and ideological novel. Though the immediate historical background (fourteenth century Western Europe) is reconstructed with slow, deliberate accuracy, capitalizing on Eco's extensive knowledge of the period, it is handled rhetorically in such a way as to acquire symbolic value. For one thing, Adso—though a well-intentioned and faithful "chronicler"—is hindered in his task by his inexperience and inability to grasp the complexities of the world (from which, after all, he took refuge inside a monastery). He is unexpectedly vague concerning such important details as the actual name and location of the abbey, while his information on various historical and religious aspects is fragmentary and indirect (part of it gathered through "overhearing"). The abbey he describes, lost among "such narrow and sudden juttings of sea and mountains," becomes a general *topos*: a veritable microcosm of nationalities and beliefs, a "speculum mundi" summing up, in its perfect architecture, "the golden rule in the construction of the ark" (p. 444). Adso feels called by a symbolic mission to this "outpost" of learning and culture, sternly guarding its treasures against the background of an "aging," divided world. He is destined "to witness [and report] a great and celestial massacre." This religious-symbolical frame is reflected further in the "liturgical" division of hours that underlies the temporal structure of the novel. But even this partition is rendered imprecise by various narrative *transgressions,* as pointed out in the titles: "From Lauds to Prime," "Towards Nones," "After Nones," "After Vespers," and especially a succession of "Nights" that escape *canonical time,* establishing a more fluid (and uncontrollable) narratorial time. "This abbey is a place of many bizarre events at night. . . ," a divided reality by daytime and night. The calendar of the story is equally symbolic, spanning *seven* days at the end of November, beginning of December and becoming gradually immersed in an actual (and figurative) narrative fog.

The religious-historical framework invokes (in spite of the disclaimer in the editorial note: "this is a tale of books, not of everyday worries" and "commitments to the present") a larger frame of *narrative allusions* that makes of this book, according to some reviewers, almost a "roman à clef." The intrepid reader may identify numerous political, religious and ideological parallels between the fourteenth century and our equally troubled "postmodernist age." The author himself indirectly justifies this hunt for allusions when, in the opening note, he tells us of the circumstances in which he found (and then lost again) a French translation of Adso's manuscript in Prague, six days before the Soviet invasion of that "unhappy city." A number of other common references (such as one to the troubled Danube, "crowded with ships loaded with fools going toward a dark place"—echoed by Adso in the end of his memoirs) provide further justification for identifying Eco with his narratorial alter ago.

But the "editorial" note(s), like so many fictional prefaces, call forth a subtler method of interpretation that transcends the mere *allegorical code* (of one-to-one references). As we are duly warned, the "original" text was lost by degrees in a succession of translations and misappropriations. What we are reading now is "naturally a manuscript": the English translation (expertly done by William Weaver) of an Italian fragmentary recreation of "an obscure neo-Gothic French version of a seventeeth century Latin edition of a work written in Latin by a German monk toward the end of the fourteenth century" (p. 4). Useless to say that, after losing his *source text* (the second in the order of "translations"), Eco cannot trace it back even to its bibliographical references, suspecting this text to be a "forgery" or his own "vision of a book yet unwritten." The method by which this novel came to be written, "involving great physical fatigue and intense motor excitement," resembles that by which Adso supposedly had created the original text, equally puzzled by a world seen "darkly, through a glass" and by the complex analogies between the *time of living* and the *time of writing.* Both are exercises in *intertextuality,* dramatically

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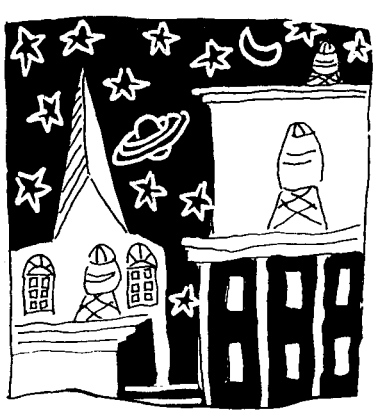
illustrating the fragmentation and imperfections of the resultant Text.

Thus, the true theme in *The Name of the Rose* is that of the World as an Intertext, a baffling cultural Labyrinth. The reader acquainted with Eco's theoretical books may discover a further intertextual *dialogue* between this novel and, for example, the recently published *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Indiana University Press, 1984). See, in this sense, several of the references to the *rose* of the title, whether erotic (Shakespearean or medieval, reminiscent of *The Romance of the Rose*) or metaphysical, being echoed and anticipated in the latter book as part of a more general theory of signifying, of "naming." But the most interesting theme there is that of the opposition between the epistemological model of the *dictionary* and that of an *encyclopedia*. Our semantic representations (like those of the medieval Schoolmen) seem to follow the latter model: a symbolic labyrinth of meanings that, instead of falling into finite, clearly defined categories, rather dissolve "into a potentially unordered and unrestricted galaxy of pieces of world knowledge." (*Semiotics*, p. 68) "The universe of semiosis, that is the universe of human culture, must be conceived as structured like a labyrinth of the third type," "according to a network of interpretants" (*Ibid.*, p. 83).

The main characters in Eco's novel live in and explore a "universe of semiosis," metaphorically represented by the labyrinthine Library of the abbey, located in the "Aedificium." Few are aware of its actual *map* and *content*: for, in terms that remind us of a Melvillean theme, William sees humanity as captive in a labyrinthine world whose design cannot be perceived from the *inside*. Man can retrace only the design of a contrived, "artistic" labyrinth. And in certain ways the labyrinthine library William and Adso begin to explore is both a "sign of the labyrinth of the world" and a *cultural*, therefore *interpretable* reality. For, as William already knows from his masters Abélard, Roger Bacon or William of Ockham, "the universe, which seems to be a . . . mazelike network of real properties, is in effect a mazelike network of *cultural* properties . . ." (*Semiotics*, p. 104), an *Intertext*.

Accordingly, if William the philosopher is a skeptic, distrusting "signs" and "patterns" when applied to higher metaphysics, William the ex-inquisitor and master detective knows how to use these cognitive instruments to solve a murder mystery or unravel a cryptic library code. Nevertheless, all his erudite knowledge of libraries and their secret texts or codes, also his familiarity with the psychology and motives of "men who are living among books, with books, from books . . ." (p. 112), will not save him from momentary defeats and blunders. On one hand he is often applying a too sophisticated, symbolic code of interpretation to facts that are simpler and disconnected. On the other, behind the cryptic code of the library that seems so "elementary" to him at one point, is a more perfidious maze of relations, multiplying, giving out mystifying signs. A diabolic mind is at work in the library (Jorge's), transforming a citadel of learning into a fortress of concealment. At the same time, however, the library is a *living, uncontrollable* reality, "the place of a century-old murmuring, an imperceptible dialogue" between books, "a receptacle of powers not to be ruled by a human mind" (p. 286). As such, this *living intertext*, like the outside world, can be only seen "darkly, through a glass" (William's miraculous reading glasses), as a "Mirror of Enigmas" (to use the title of a Borges story from *Labyrinths* that also elaborates on Saint Paul's aphorism).

Significantly, William is not capable of adequately decoding the "secrets" of this library without the unwitting participation of Adso, whose "dreams," innocent or nightmarish visions, provide unexpected clues. Adso proves a better traveler through the living intertext: easily impressed, passionate, puzzled, walking through it in a state of enlightened, imaginative frenzy, "as if [his] whole body were an eye, before and behind." He stumbles onto the truth, the entrance and exit of the labyrinth, or into the one erotic experience that will invest his life account with meaning and pathos. And if for William the library is still a universe "of books that are dreams of books," a maze of cultural references from which he hopes to reconstruct the *missing link*, the interdicted book that had triggered the succession of crimes, for Adso it becomes a living prophecy of himself, "telling, through mysterious cachinations, [his] present story" (p. 241).



In certain ways Jorge of Burgos, the omnipresent censor of the abbey, resembles William. He too regards the library as an intertextual space, with texts (like Aristotle's lost second part of the *Poetics*, allegedly hidden by Jorge in the center of the labyrinthine library) capable of fostering heretic trends that threaten to undermine the Institutionalized Order. Therefore Jorge duplicates the "spiritual labyrinth" of the library in a "terrestrial" maze of secret rooms that prevent any intrusion. He expects the other monks to comply with their humble duties as antiquarians, rubricators or copyists at the periphery of the "Aedificium." But several of the monks still try, against great perils, to transcend their condition as *annotators* (in Borgesian terms) of preëxistent Scriptures. They indulge (like Adelmo) in imaginative, fabulous "marginalia" on the books that they are illuminating; or devour the poisoned pages of the forbidden book (like Venantius of Salvemec) in order to decipher its riddle.

More than any of them, it is Adso who finally attains the true status of a *writer:* he fulfills his initiation as a "scribe" alongside William, surpassing in certain respects his master; and he completes his "chronicle," agonizing over its meaning in the lonely and cold Scriptorium of his monastery, making good use of William's gift of glasses. But most importantly he returns years later to the ruined abbey (consumed by the fire stirred by vengeful Jorge) in order to reconstruct from the ashes a kind of "lesser library . . . made up of fragments, quotations, unfinished sentences, amputated stumps of books" (p. 500). He hands down to us this imperfect "symbol of the greater, vanished" library, a kind of "immense acrostic" that, like his own writing, has salvaged from the "perfectly level and boundless" desert of death a wealth of "images" and words. —*Marcel Cornis-Pop*

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The Price

"Because the price of used furniture is nothing but a viewpoint, and if you wouldn't understand the viewpoint it is impossible to understand the price."

—Gregory Solomon (Arthur Miller)

"The Price," by Arthur Miller, opened at the Morosco Theatre in New York on February 7, 1969. Though the play's time is noted as *Today,* that was back then, and in that the characters' situations and points of view were drastically effected by the crash and great depression of the '30s, the play is now, in fact, a period piece. Two estranged brothers, a police sergeant and a successful surgeon, meeting for the first time in 15 years, on the day when the family heirlooms are finally to be sold because the building where the family once lived, in which the furniture and other artifacts have been stored all these years, is scheduled for demolition—that's the plot. Letting go the old makes way for the new—if you can let go.

On the surface, to Victor Franz, policeman, and Esther, his wife, the price they might get for the furniture is of great concern. To make up for a life that has been no bed of roses, it could mean a financial cushion to face retirement with, the security to give them a little ease in their declining years. Brother Walter's life has not been a bed of roses either, but professional success and the acquisition of money have not been his main problems, so that *price* is of less concern to him. As for Gregory Solomon, the 85-year-old Jewish used furniture dealer, it has to do with the market for artifacts, many of which, he keeps realistically insisting, are anachronistic in the changed world, a world to which, ironically, he seems more attuned than the others.

But there are other prices that people and families pay. To accommodate their alienation, to buttress their pride, to insulate themselves from change and avoid risk, to maintain their blindness, to avoid intimacy, to keep from being overwhelmed by failure—these prices are the play's themes. And although there is movement back and forth around all these, some tentative touching, and small almost-understandings, finally they are not resolved, and the audience leaves the theatre conscious of these costs. The last image of the piece and Miller's final comment is Solomon's ironic laughter. Alone on the stage, after the unhappy brothers have fled—still haunted by their ghosts—Solomon is surrounded by what he's bought cheap, and cost the brothers dear. It's what's left of the Franz family—fleshless bones.

Ulu Grossbard, an old friend, and once my second assistant director on Arthur Penn's movie, "Miracle Worker," directed the original Broadway production, so there was some synchronicity last fall when, haunted by personal ghosts of my own, wrestling with some fleshless bones, I was the assistant director on the production of "The Price" staged by the Mill Valley Center for the Performing Arts as the opener for their '83-'84 season. Fresh from a class at the Bay Area Playwright's Festival, I had all sorts of presumptuous ideas about how this "old fashioned" traditional play might be adapted to *a modern sensibility*. Then, sitting through six weeks of rehearsals, four hours almost every night and some weekends too, I learned the value of the original words, the value of the play's ambiguity, and its place in time. I became aware of the dedication of the actors, the director, and the company, the price paid by all to put the play up.

In the real world we play our parts,

actors in the tragedy, the comedy, the whatever we make of our lives. Whichever side of the bed we get out of each morning, we look in our bathroom mirrors and put on a persona for the day. It's as real a mask as any actor assumes, walking on the stage at night to perform the make believe—only maybe we don't know it as they are supposed to. So what's the difference between them and me, and what is it that drives *the actor* to live so much time in this make-believe—creative expression or fear of being found out? Them and me.

In my time I have known actors whose *real* life was whatever performance they were doing at the time; off the stage or set they were like shadow men and women, full of frailty and woe. I have known others who moved easily and gracefully in the so-called real world and still, when they stepped in front of the lights, something went click—like a shutter opening—and they *became* the character they were supposed to play. And there are actors, good ones, who always play only a version of themselves; and others in different roles in different plays—sometimes even in the same play—that appear to be absolutely different people. With myriad variations on the foregoing there are, of course, also actors who not only fail to create magic in their performance, but to get a *performance* from them is like pulling teeth.

What then of the four who play their parts in whatever hundredth staging this is of this 16-year-old play in this esteemed regional theatre here in Northern California in this eighth decade of the 20th century? All themselves around the fifth decade in their lives, three of them have been doing it or first came in contact with it when they were in high school or college; one has *only* been acting for 15 years. With the exception of one who is a member of Bay Area Theatre Workers, the rest are Equity, so they're all "professionals"—yet none of them make their living being actors.

Tom Dahlgren (Victor Franz) was a pre-med at UC-Berkeley, graduated as a zoology major, but he's been a banker for 26 years. Married that long too, he has five sons, ages 14-22, and he's the one who didn't start acting until about fifteen years ago. The

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bank he worked in was in San Francisco, near KQED (the public television station) where they were producing a series called "San Francisco Mix." They needed a guy to come in and do one line as a *straight* business man—mixed in with a hippie, a black man, the dumb blond . . . the thread in the shows was word meanings, how they would be defined by different kinds of people.

"It scared the hell out of me. I studied it all night long, and forgot it in the morning . . . my teeth felt dry. I was terrible but I did it, and the feeling afterwards was just terrific. I thought, hell, this is good—do some more of this . . ." Signing up with a local talent agency, about 2 weeks later he got an interview for a small part in Michael Ritchie's film, "The Candidate" . . . Then a "Hallmark Hall of Fame."

"Well, I thought, this is hot shit! There were a couple of other movies . . . in Coppola's 'Godfather II' where I went to the Caribbean and thought this is really just a breeze. Then, everything I did, I got worse and worse—because I just didn't know what I was doing. I thought just be intuitive and everything would be swell." So he took some night classes that were being given by San Francisco's American Conservatory Theatre (ACT) and found out he really couldn't *act* at all. The next year he took a more advanced class, did some workshops.

"I never did any theatre until about 5-6 years ago. And it was a terrible experience. You have to work harder, there were a lot of ego problems . . . it was a sour kind of experience and I thought if this is what theatre's all about, well, I don't like this so much. But then we opened and it was wonderful . . . *the audience*, being with them . . . I really liked that a lot.

"I continued doing bits and pieces . . . some commercials for the money, small parts in pictures . . . I got a call about Sam Shepard's 'True West'—they were having trouble finding somebody for the part of the agent. I went over and read, went back and read, and got the part. I did that on the regular run of six weeks, then it shut down for a couple of months and then came back and did another run of eight weeks. They got some investors and took it to a big theatre for a ten-week run—eight shows a week. But I was working full time too—and it was just a killer. I handled it by sleeping on the floor of the dressing room. But it was terrific.

"I love the movies because they treat you so nicely . . . the money, and you have a lot of fun and it's cleaner. In theatre you rehearse on a nice day in a dark place, and the process is just a killer because it's so painful. But you have more of a chance to build a part—and when you get to the results then it's far different . . . Oh yes! In films you fiddle-fart around when you have a small part, indicating a lot—but much as you think you are doing, you don't. I studied with one guy from Southern California who had devised a sort of an outgrowth from 'the method' which was *his* method. There was a lot of how to color a part, how to grab on to something, the images, the intentions and counter-intentions. Those kinds of things you can put together and make a quick character, or in the long run too.

"I don't know a lot of plays because I didn't really ever study it, but I know what I like. I certainly like Sam Shepard, and I want to do 'Death of a Salesman' in the worst way."

Kitty Newman (Esther Franz) has acted off and on for 35 years. Born and raised in a small "waspish" southern town in Virginia, she said, "I got into theatre for pretty defensive reasons. In high school I felt like the only Jew . . . anti-semitism, prejudice . . . I was angry and hurt, and the one way I could get some kind of recognition was when I was in a play." Acting was a mask for her, a way of escaping "and it brought about a kind of popularity—I stayed away from making friends until I was doing theatre." Later in her life she remembers seeing a movie with Anna Magnani in it and thinking, "God! You don't have to be beautiful to be great."

Studying theatre at Emerson College in Boston, after graduation she went to New York—actors' Mecca—and started making rounds but she "couldn't take the rejections." Discouraged, she took a "practical" graduate program at Columbia, and its emphasis on dramatic literature renewed her; she went back to making rounds. There were tastes of it in a small Off-Broadway role, propping in another theatre, summer stock, and some Off-Off Broadway—once "so far off that it was up state in Poughkeepsie."

In 1960 when she came to the Bay Area she did community theatre, began teaching in a pre-school program which is her specialty. Full-time until 1978 when she was laid off, now she's a substitute. Never married, she calls her career "desultory," but she's continued acting, taking what there was—extra work in movies, parts in industrial films. And there's been the theatre. A member of Bay Area Theatre Workers Association (BATWA), she has a reputation for being good at her craft.

"I love it. I wish I could make it my life's work, but as we know it's difficult to do it here and get any kind of remuneration. My regret is that I didn't stick to it in the beginning . . . I really do regret that. It took them 20 years but I had friends in college who are finally making it. Young people want immediate gratification; there's nothing worse than rejection, and at that point that felt like the story of my life."

Robert Morris (Walter Franz) is Robert Parnell on the Equity rolls. In 1966 in Southern California, hired as an understudy, and doing matinees (which eventually led to replacing the actor who played the young professor in the west coast premiere of "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf"), he joined Equity and since there was already a "Morris" he became Parnell.

Acting a little in grade school, but not in high school, after graduation he enlisted in the Navy. That was 1954 and in his ship's library was an anthology of plays which he read from cover to cover. Out of the Navy and attending Pasadena College, one afternoon a friend was waiting outside a classroom to audition for "Another Part of the Forest." He suggested Morris audition because they were looking for *older* people (after his 4-year Navy hitch he's older). Getting a part he also got hooked. "The drama clique was pretty *methody* . . . intense . . . pseudo-beatnik. In the next two years I did a number of plays, and saw a lot more at the Pasadena Playhouse where I had a job being chief of the usherettes."

In the cold winter of 1960, he hitch-hiked to Mecca (New York) and "defeated my own purposes . . . didn't have much money, just the GI bill and few bucks from my mother so I got a job in the Abercrombie & Fitch shoe department and

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JACK MYERS

WAITING FOR THE PART WITH A BITE OUT OF ME TO SNAP

I was used to hearing my neighbors
  cursing "Christ!"
and the walls of my house so thin
I thought someone's calling me
and I'd get up and say
"OK, I'll fix it." And I'd end up
with my head inside the "everything drawer"
looking for my goddamned melted hammer
so I could whack what's wrong back in place.
And when I fixed it so it didn't move
I'd say to myself like a one-trick dog,
"Pretty Good, have a beer."

In those days it was almost always winter
and the sweet old hungers drove me inward
and I'd trudge upstairs and pull the chain
to light the darkness up, and then I'd write
across the distance while the vines grew crazily
across the windows and the cats stood waiting
in the half-lit room to beam me down.

In those days everything was going to happen
because I said so, and a promise was a promise.
Because my religion was believing. And because
I knew I knew a few things deep enough
so when I'd say these things I'd never blink:
"once and for all, this is for keeps."

And, indeed, I got across. Everything's finally fixed.
I've got a garden full of pecans and plums and a skyful
of passing pleasantries. Lying here, I imagine painting
a courtesan in a purple sari through which the afternoon light
is shining. And she, feeding me fruits and nuts, is giving
herself to me bit by bit under the guardian trees
against a harmony of blue.

But then there's the feeling of a specific lack
of depth, and I suggest for old times' sake
right out of the blue
there should be a strike force of stony black birds
diving diagonally down.

Cushman's bakery at night. It was all I could do just to survive . . . I was beat. There just about a year, seeing some Off-Broadway plays, when my mother became ill, I came back to California and started doing community theatre in the Los Angeles area."

The movies, he said, didn't interest him except once when somebody said get an agent. "So I put on a suit and went someplace on Sunset to this woman who had a pretty good rep. She looked at me and said, 'you have nice hands.'" He didn't know what that meant until she explained she was talking about being a hand model—for cigarette commercials. . . . "but," he said, "I never went that route."

Married, eventually with two kids, doing little theatre, driving a cab, being a meter reader for the Gas Company, a driving teacher, the manager of an Abbey Rents ("four hundred a month and a nice title"), finally in '66, after "Virginia Woolf," he went to work for an investigation firm and has had that as an occupation ever since. About 5 years ago he was transferred to Northern California, and then went on his own which, he says, "was the best move I made."

Morris is a private investigator, "and I really like what I do." He's separated from his wife now, and his son is studying Theatre Arts at UCLA. His daughter, who always wanted to be a model and was "Miss Marin County" a couple of years ago, is now in Paris and doing quite well.

When he was working first as an investigator he only did a play once every two or three years, but after coming north he started acting again in Marin County. A couple of years ago he went to The Oregon Shakespearean Festival in Ashland and was introduced to Artistic Director Jerry Turner, who at the time was looking for people. Morris was seriously tempted. "But then I thought, hell, I would have to go up there for a year or more and I have these steady clients . . . if I wasn't around I'd lose touch."

When I asked him what had kept him from never quite making the full commitment to the theatre, he said, "Fear, probably . . . I had a couple of kids, a wife—even though she was understanding. Still I would go through my periodic crazy thing of not being able to stand my job, the tie and suit and bullshit—the times when I said, By God! I'm going to be an actor . . . I could have done it. I don't know if I could have been a great actor, but I could have made a living at it . . . but then I have always thought, get a few more lines in your face and you can be a good character actor . . . I didn't want to be a star . . . if I could just make a living at it . . . I do like what I'm doing, but if a nice offer came along I sure as hell would consider it."

I asked Abe Kalish (Gregory Solomon) why he wanted to be an actor.

"Lord knows (laughs) . . . I don't think you ask that question . . . I don't think any one has that choice . . . talking about acting is very boring; I don't like to talk about it."

—Well, how did you come to be one then?

"Just went to an acting school in LA—I grew up in that whole milieu . . . atmosphere, and it probably did rub off—influenced a lot by movies."

—What school?

"Geller Theatre Workshop . . . thought the best way to learn was to do plays and that's what they specialized in . . . schooling was a mish-

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mash and bullshit, but I still feel that's the best way . . . the late '40s and early '50s *The Method* was the thing so I got involved with that . . . I go back to the original thing where you learn by getting up there and doing it—whatever your method is. It's simple, it's really very easy . . . very simple . . . there's so much crap written and talked about . . . I'm loath to discuss it . . ."

—I hear that . . . so what kind of work did you do?

"Oh, I worked at RKO to pay for my schooling . . . and Technicolor, and then I went to New York to work with a teacher that I had heard a lot about. Brecht, off Broadway, was the only show I did when I was there . . . I didn't stay . . . I went twice and didn't stay too long and came back to LA and then came up here where I've been ever since . . ."

—When did you arrive?

"Middle fifties . . . almost 30 years ago . . . been working here steadily as an actor, and other jobs so I could act."

—What other jobs?

"Oh, for many years I worked in the securities business, and now I don't work at anything full time, so I can do this—if possible. Still have to work most of the time at something . . . Sometimes I do get professional acting jobs and sometimes I don't—if you stay in San Francisco (or in LA) it's pretty much that way unless you're in a series or you are very well established or you do voice-overs and print, or commercials . . . I've done those, but there isn't enough to sustain you in any style. . ."

—What kicks do you get out of acting?

"My kicks. . .? Oh, it's a kind of high . . . once you've experienced the audience it's very difficult to forget it—especially in a comedy . . . and I do a lot of comedy. . ."

—And your favorite playwright?

". . . Favorite playwright? Hmmm? I don't really have a favorite playwright . . . I enjoy Miller very much . . . I'd like to do Willy one day . . . I really can't say of contemporary writers . . . My favorite playwright, of course, is Shakespeare, if there has to be one . . . I've done a lot of him . . . after him everything's duck soup . . . It's not just speech, it's movement . . . language . . . takes a lot to do well. . . . I admire people who do it well. I worked at Ashland, in the '50s . . .my first experience with Shakespeare . . . very exciting in a lot of ways . . . some ways not so much because they're more interested in the visual aspect up there than in the content. It's difficult to mount that many Shakespearean plays with a mixed professional and amateur cast and get an over-all moving piece . . . What you get is something very beautiful to look at and an occasional performance . . . I haven't been able to go back to Ashland . . . they asked me if I wanted to come back and I said—(chuckling)—no. I sort of burnt my bridge there, because after a while when you're working in a piece and it's not too satisfactory, you lose your discipline, your interest. I really felt they weren't getting into the meat . . . I was very involved in the method in those days and I just felt they weren't doing it. Shakespeare's done a lot now, but he wasn't in the '50s . . . only three or four places and actors would migrate there, and as a result they were very experienced, very interesting to watch . . . I probably sound contradictory . . . some of it was very, very good, and some of it wasn't. . . ."

—Have you been satisfied with your career?

"Well, you would like to make all your living from it . . . I mean it's happening more and more . . . it's up and down . . . it would be nice to become part of a regional company—work in the ensemble where you know everybody for a long time. . . ."

—What do you think of this play?

"I love it. It's an old well-made play . . . a lot of his work seems to be all the same people—he's writing about his family and their experiences, and having grown up with that it's part of my background so I love it . . . I've had my eye on this part for some time."

2.

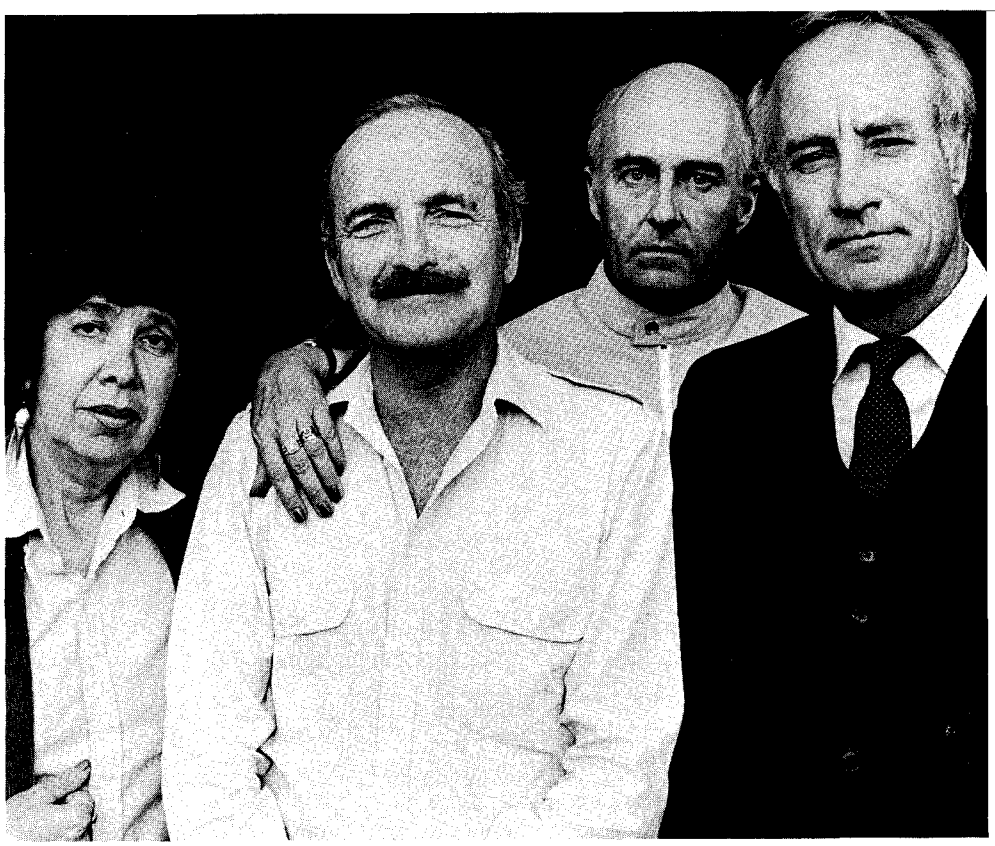
"what's the play about . . . who has the power . . . the price of life . . ."
—Rehearsal Notebook

7/21 Saturday: Casting—actors reading, I'm watching—should I look for *the character*? First guy doesn't have authority—because he's holding the book—? Theme comes out . . . the family hidden . . . Solomon searching for information . . . 'people I'm interested in . . . always a new story.'

7/28 Tuesday: the director says: 'actors go off and work . . . bring it back to me . . . add some, subtract some. . . .'

—The dead father as character in play—chair center stage, what the lights come up on. . . .

8/7 Sunday: In the hot school room (the rehearsal space) the director moves objects to represent the stage



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dressing . . . the father's armchair . . . a table . . . 'this is the harp. . . .'

—The director: 'get up and take the center! Let him pursue you down instead of up . . . that's too important a move. . . .'

—I think, carry the foil . . . a metaphor for violence . . . repressed violence between Victor and Esther . . . Keep Solomon down—too actorish. . . .

—Run-through 9:45 PM (Esther can't make the 10:05 bus) . . . see how blocking established in 1st run-through is vitally important. . . .

—later: heads drop, eyes close. . . .

8/8 Monday: Cut-off is 10:50. Esther's bus! Blocking—2nd night—how difficult it is to move 4 people around bare school room with pretend props. . . .

8/9 Tuesday: Read through 2nd time. Actors don't have blocking in their scripts. Stage Manager works it out . . . *Blocking must always consider sight lines!* . . . my first reading was the words, now on the 2nd and 3rd night of blocking, the words are secondary to the movement, the blocking . . . difficult!

—Production meeting: 1st time I see the theatre, the stage built at one end of main meeting room of the community Club House—many limitations—original set design called for corner of attic room with window up left, but designer changed it, and the position of the doors. The blocking—labored over the past 2 days—will have to be changed. 'Minor,' director says '. . . as an actor I just want to get the script and go away and bring it back in two weeks; as a director I am sitting and biting my tongue, holding off giving them notes until they have a chance to do it *inside* for while. Ought to make notes about the good things the actors do now, so none of us forget. . . . Solomon's a method actor and working inside himself, he'll need watching so that his interpretation works with others. . . .' (I remember what Robert Woodruff said at the Playwright's festival . . . the eclectic training of American actors . . .)

—Lighting designer says: 'I hope you aren't the kind of director who wants to see their eyes!' The director: 'most actors don't know how to do that.'

—TAPE THE FLOOR BY SUNDAY!

8/15 Monday: Solomon performance not consistent. Victor's having a hard time playing to him, also hard to make directorial refinements . . . he spends *too much* time in that chair. . . .

8/16 Tuesday: Look for emotional climax of each act . . . 2nd act works well . . . characters come alive with nuances—mostly. . . .

8/17 Wednesday: Victor keeps calling Walter Victor . . . Upstage is the stronger position. . . .

8/22 Monday: Without the book . . .

—Victor personality. Senex . . . getting rid of furniture means first step to new life . . . the furniture's the past . . . which he can't integrate into present and, therefore, can't move into future. . . .

—Blocking . . . Solomon should move around room checking stuff out, not just sit . . . continue prowling after Esther's entrance . . . Question—is Walter anti-semitic?

8/24 Wednesday: Performances change again once they stop using the book. Lines get changed. Business gets changed. Final business comes on stage . . . so the 1st reading with the book—let the performance come out. Then put down tape and work with rough props, mark the blocking in the book. Begin to get rid of book—refine blocking and business.

—Question. What are they *talking* about? What is the *scene* about? They're adversaries who keep touching. . . .

8/29 Monday: Actors are responsible for their own props. Blocking again, can't learn the lines until the blocking's done. Problem's not being able to work in actual theatre sooner . . . conflicts with other community happenings there. . . .

—Notes: TOO FAST! KEEP IT DOWN! Solomon's story of his daughter . . . intimacy starts. What is this scene about? Two men with lots of stories—frailties of life.

9/2 Friday: First night in the theatre. The children of the theatre romp, searching new place—the dressing rooms—playing with the props—sitting in the furniture. I walk around on stage looking closely at the set. The workmanship shows holes—different from film where camera would see . . . I look at the light board and see how the instruments can be pre-set. The director, the lighting man, the prop lady discuss where to hang the chandelier—what practical lights go where? Finally, 10 minutes late, the rehearsal starts. Performance looks different here. In rehearsals at the school there was a familiarity—I was so close to the actors. Here, with the work lights, they're on stage and the floor is almost 3 feet high—they (the actors) seem very large. Victor talks about taking a day off work to finally learn the words—how does he know *how long* it will take?

—Act I notes: 'give me more faces—three quarters at least—cheat it—feed each other's energy and hold that energy in the beginning to keep the audience interested—get the God damn books out of your hands!'

—Walter, get a haircut.

—Change Solomon's last line to 'fifty years.'

—Victor—close the door.

9/4 Saturday: 1st dress notes: watch losing the end words—the end words are *crucial* to the text. . . .

9/5 Sunday: 2nd dress notes: in Act II one actor went up. There's not supposed to be anybody on the book. . . .

9/9 Friday: Opening Night '. . . lights to preshow' '. . . go in five' '. . . places' '. . . house to half' '. . . house out' '. . . take five and start with two. . . .'

3.

—'PRICE' A SOLID EFFORT—
Quartet delivers a Miller marvel!
—Peter Magnani

In his review in the Mill Valley *Record*, Sept. 14, 1983 Magnani wrote: ". . . a solid production that delivers the full impact of this soul-wrenching play. 'The Price' is very much an actors' play, and it's common to wonder in such cases how much credit the director deserves for the quality of an individual's performance. In the case of this production, however, the strength of the cast derives as much from its ensemble work as from single performances, and surely director Ben Dickson should be praised for helping the four performers to forge a union that makes the whole stronger than the sum of its parts. This is particularly praiseworthy in a play like 'The Price' where great emphasis lies on the quality of several troubled relationships and the characters all possess varying, often fluctuating degrees of alienation from each other."

—*Lawrence Sturhahn*

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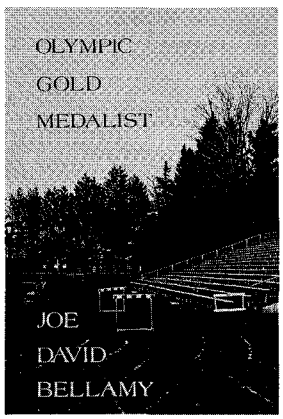

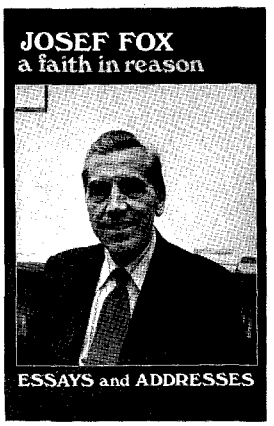

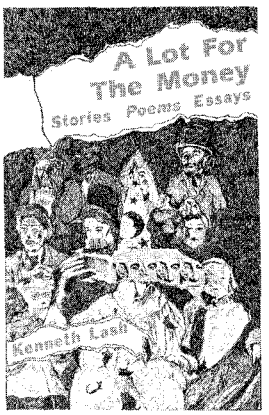

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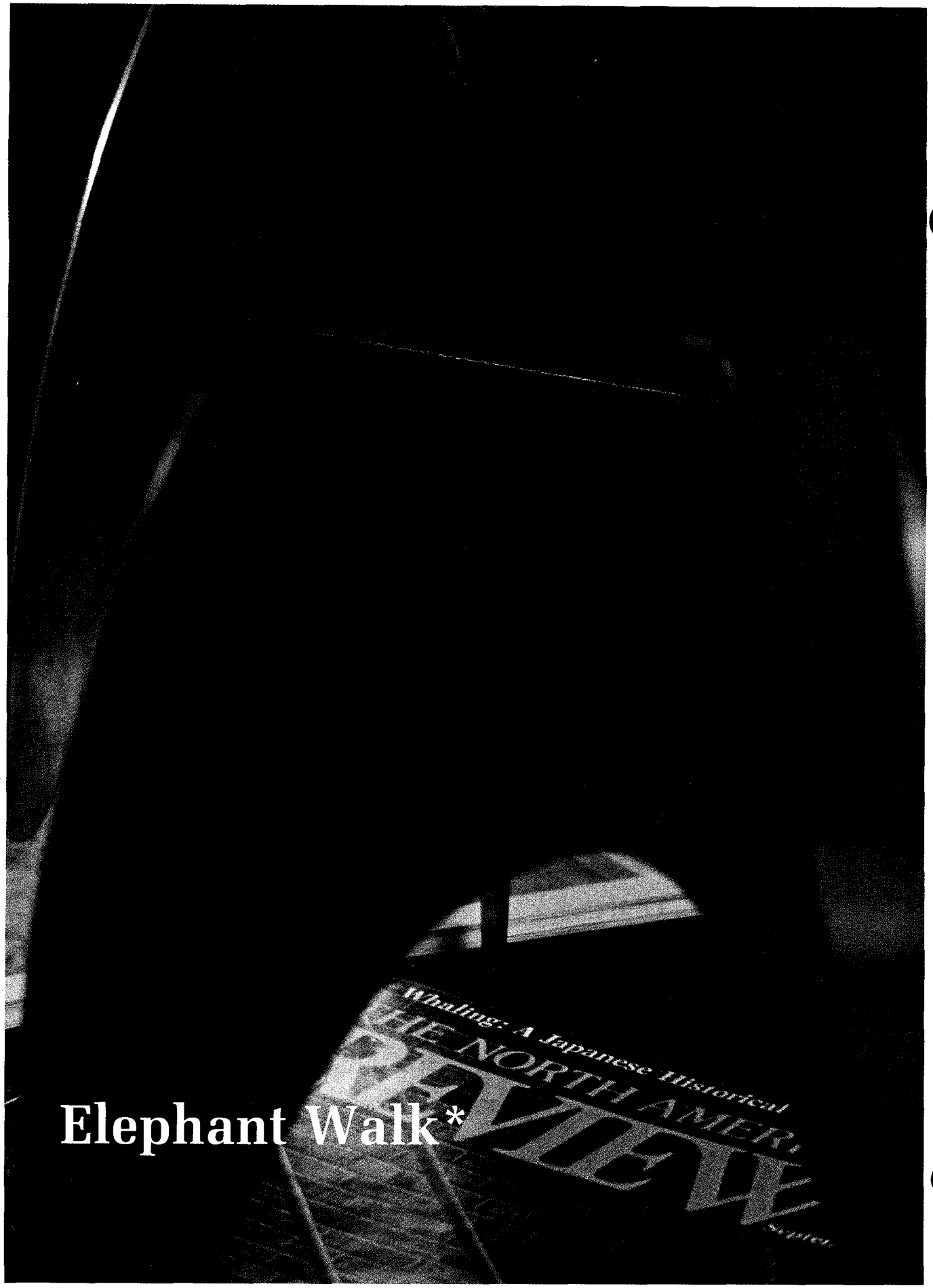

The "Ellie," a stabile by Alexander Calder, symbolizes the National Magazine Awards. The NAR herd, won for Fiction in 1981 and 1983, is pictured here. (Photo by Bill Witt)

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